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ILL-GOTTEN GOLD

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CHAPTER I.

LOVE A LA MODE.

It is seldom that the weather in the early part of May in and about New York City is pleasant enough to invite the most enthusiastic lover of nature to walk beneath leaden skies and dripping pavements, which as a rule are all one can expect from a beneficent weather clerk, who seems to do little to actually benefit humanity, aside from drawing his regular yearly stipend, which he does in segments with conscious regularity. On this day, however, the sun had deigned to shine down with an almost summer brilliancy, and the streets were literally swarming with a hurrying crowd of pedestrians, who seemed eager to make the most of a glorious spring day, which had appeared almost a month ahead of time.

There was one young man, however, who did not share in the general rejoicing over

the weather, but remained in his downtown room, a prey to bitter thoughts. From his general ensemble, the average observer would feel safe in imagining that he would be one of the very first to avail himself of the occasion, both to admire and be admired. Of the latter fact, there could be but little doubt. He was a young man of splendid physique. Though not over tall, his closely cut crop of dark brown hair, that still would insist upon disclosing the fact that it was decidedly curly, was at an altitude of precisely five feet nine and three-quarter inches from his heels. His figure, too, was of that peculiar build, which promises, not only great muscular strength and physical endurance, but gives that semi-graceful, purely masculine swing to the walk which is often called the embodiment of manly grace by that portion of admiring femininity, who worship at the shrine of Apollo.

As for his face, little could be judged as to its claims to either beauty or strength of character for the young man, just at present.

was in one of the worst of humors, and the face, though not distorted with passion, was in a troubled state, which showed that he had been brooding for some time over a real or fancied wrong. Yet there was no mistaking the fact that he was one of nature's occasional freaks, a really handsome man without the failing of a large majority of the class, who, if purchased at the world's conservative valuation, and sold at their own schedule rate, would realize a large and enthusiastic profit to somebody.

This young man had been the victim of repeated youthful successes. He had been a little behind in his studies at college possibly, but in the sports and athletics he had left his competitors so far in the rear that he had been their acknowledged champion. He could pull an oar until the shell was lifted sheer out of water; could run in a foot race all day if necessary; speed with the foot-ball in a manner almost defying capture and above all, with the boxing gloves, could put at rest any suspicion of a competitor, that the aspir-

ant was a novice in their use. He was, in fact, a rare specimen; a beautiful animal; but still a gentleman.

He was loved of women, yet loved them but little until a short time before, when Bernice Crawford had won his heart and love, to use as the present circumstances were to show. He thought that he had lavished upon her all the wealth of love of a life time, but it was his first deep feeling in that line, and young men are prone to be deceived in themselves on such occasions. He would live to learn the fallacy of his present feelings; yet he was prepared to hate the world at sight and nauseate at the sight of a woman. How foolish! Age would mellow his heart, and make it better adapted to cope with the fickle sex.

His room was on the second floor, and large windows looked out upon the busy street, where crowds of indiscriminate humanity jostled each other either in the race for a livelihood, or the pursuit of pleasure, the latter class alas, sadly in the minority. It

was a large room, quite elegantly furnished, the prevailing tints being in olives and rich Turkish reds, giving a decidedly Oriental appearance to the apartment. Connected by a doorway, curtained with tapestry, was a retiring room, such as all young men with any claim to "tone," whatever that uncertain quality may be, never fail to possess if they live in a metropolis. At the present time the curtain was slightly drawn aside and disclosed a dimly lighted interior, which contained a couch and other little accessories, which he used either for his own convenience, or that of his friends after the rigor of a more than usually late fête.

The young man thus offered for the inspection of the reader was pacing moodily up and down, passing and repassing an onyx center table, upon which was thrown in a careless fashion a number of letters, all of which were addressed to Harlow S. Ritchie, the middle initial standing for Seagrave, a fact that was known to his personal friends. He had opened but one of the missives, which

he had selected from the rest, and held the sheet in his hand while the envelope lay abandoned upon the floor, with the written side up, showing a dainty and careful chirography. A faint odor of wood violets pervaded the room from the creamy paper, and the eyes of the man kindled in remembrance, as his thin nostrils took in the familiar perfume.

He dashed the paper to the carpet, where it quivered as if resenting the indignity thus shown to the sender, then strode to the window, where he gazed out with a moody frown, paying no further attention to the neglected correspondence upon the table. Some one looked up at him from across the street, but he did not appear to notice that he was observed, and kept his eyes on space. He stepped to a drawer in a sideboard, and opening it took out a photograph, which he gazed upon fixedly for a few moments. The sight seemed to anger him at once, for a frown gathered upon his face, and turning quickly, he flung the picture from him with a passionate ges-

ture. Across the room it flew in its erratic course, just as the door opened, and the piece of card-board took the new-comer squarely in the face, and then lodged in the fold of his coat at his breast, where the sweet countenance seemed to look up into his face saucily.

"Thanks, awfully," he said, with a laugh, looking down at the portrait. "How carelessly you throw the fair Bernice about. Do you, by this act, throw her from your heart also?"

"I had almost said, *curse her!*" Ritchie cried, biting his lip in anger, "but I must remember that she is a woman, no matter how much she may have strained her claims to my consideration."

"You are bitter in your anger," said the new comer, "may I sit down and keep you company?"

"You know what misery loves," he answered, "so sit you down, my friend, and be miserable."

Thus invited the visitor stepped to the window and seated himself upon the capacious sill

whence he looked out upon the street and at the photograph alternately, and allowed Ritchie to pace the room as he pleased. The new comer was enough of a student human of nature to know that when a man is in that frame of mind, he is the better satisfied to be left to himself. The man as he sat there would have formed a study for a physiognomist. He was massive and dark, and might impress one unfavorably at first, probably from the rather cynical expression that seemed to find a lasting resting place about his mouth. They were well mated, these two men. One might search the world over without finding their match. Harry Damon had probably reached his thirty-fifth year, though some early sorrow might have made him appear a few years older. He was more massive in build than his younger companion, and could boast of a fraction over six feet of brawn and sinew.

An observer might try to guess his nationality, and fail signally. In fact he was not aware himself from what country his distant

ancestors had sprung. As far as he knew he was a simon-pure American, and he would have resented any thought to the contrary. His head was powerful and intelligent, yet the brow was low and the jaws a trifle heavy. His hair was of a blue black, and curled tightly to the head and about the forehead, so tightly indeed that no comb or brush could ever hope to straighten it. His eyes were large, black and lustrous, the nose finely shaped and the lips thin, red and firm. His shin was of a dark tint too peculiar to describe, warming to a faint pink hue about the cheeks and ears. He was handsome, that no one could deny, and the belles of the metropolis had wasted many an hour in trying to win his heart, a worthy object in which they were all doomed to disappointment, for he was armed against them, and had never succumbed.

After pacing the room moodily for some time, Ritchie stopped before him abruptly, and opened the conversation again. "I wish you could tell me some way of getting rid of

this disagreeable sensation. I am ashamed of myself for what I consider a weakness, but the feeling seems to cling, and I can't get rid of it."

"The first thing that is necessary in such cases," answered Damon, "is to try to bring yourself to think that the lady's action has not been out of line with the general practices of the sex. She professed love for you. Well, I suppose she did give as much affection as women are capable of, but then Chadwick came along, who in spite of his unpleasant personalty has a father who is worth something above a million. She had to scoop him in. I think I know of women who are not to be mentioned in polite society, who would think twice before they agreed to live in so close a relationship with him, as the fair Bernice has taken upon herself, and they are considered hardened."

"For God's sake, Harry, don't. You make my flesh creep."

"Well, I admit that the idea is not very comforting," answered his companion with a

grim chuckle, "one does not relish the idea that a being whom he has held in his embrace, and felt close to him with tender, clinging arms and moist lips, breathing vows of constancy, is about to give herself of her own accord, to such as he. Yet—"

"I tell you, stop!" cried the other, passionately, "can't you see that the idea drives me wild?"

"I am simply probing the wound, that is all, to find the bullet. Come now, my friend," he said, in a kinder voice, "you are not the sort of man I had expected to see take a thing like this to heart. Brace up, and tell me what she says."

"She says enough to make me wish that I could hate her now and forever," he cried, passionately, "and you will hardly believe that she has had the low effrontery to map out a future course, in which we are still to have a sincere affection for each other, platonic of course, so she says, and meet as if nothing had happened."

"An innocent little programme, certainly,"

said Damon with a satisfied laugh, "and one that would eventually drift into a state of things in which the husband would play a rather unenviable part. I don't think you would fancy it, Harl, at least after the novelty wore off.

"That's just the trouble!" cried Ritchie, stopping suddenly before his friend and laying a hand upon his shoulder. "I am afraid of myself. She has aroused a feeling in me that I might have controlled had the future promised her as totally my own, but now there is a desire for revenge within me that I know would result in the loss of all feeling but my passion, and since this last act of her's, I feel that she is not above yielding to her baser nature. I must find some way to save myself from the future and myself, for I am much less than an angel, and she is beautiful as temptation itself.

"Well, let us travel then. I am sick of New York, at least for a time, and I will keep you company."

"You would? By Jove, Harry, I believe you are a true friend, and would do much for me."

He stepped to the table as he spoke, and began to look over his correspondence. Suddenly his face lit up with a smile and he flung a letter that he had just read into his companion's lap.

"There is just what we want," he cried. Damon glanced at the letter and read:

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., 4-12-'56.

My Dear Nephew: You will undoubtedly be surprised to hear from me just now especially as I have kept in the land of silence so long; however I have heard that you are of rather a forgiving disposition, and will therefore overlook past neglect, particularly when you know that for some time past in this part of the country, every one has been fairly stumbling over each other in the race for wealth. I trust that you are at present at liberty to accept an earnest invitation to come out here and pay me a visit. You could also look about you, and see if there was anything that would be likely to suit your tastes in the line of business, and if there was nothing better, would be glad to make arrangements to have you come in with me. I will offer you inducements that I know you will not refuse. The country is rich and beautiful, and is of itself well worth a visit. Write me at once of your determination or better still, answer in person, if so inclined. Meantime know I expect you,

Your uncle

John.

"Well?" questioned the reader, as he handed back the letter. "What do you propose doing?"

"I think there is but one answer!" cried Ritchie, "I shall accept and start as soon as it is possible to leave."

"If that is the case," said the other, rising and stretching himself calmly and with great enjoyment, "I had better quit at once, and arrange my traps."

"You will go with me, then?" cried Ritchie joyfully.

"Certainly, have I not already said so?"

"Then ho for the West! and let false woman linger in the lap of luxury, 'till her face grows wrinkled, and her locks grey, for we flee from her enchantments."

"Well, good day, old man, I'll call around this evening, and we can make the final arrangements. By the way, how are you off for money?"

"Rather low just now I must admit, but I will manage to pull through, I guess."

"If you are to be pressed don't fail to call on me."

"I will. It will not be the first time."

The two young men parted, and Ritchie at once sat himself down to write a letter to the false one that was full of bitter sarcasm and rebuke and ended with the news that he was about to leave for the West. He was sure that this last piece of information would hurt her for she loved him, that he knew full well even though she had sold herself for gold. Gold? He would wade in it, and in the end buy those who had bought her—the one he had loved.

CHAPTER II.

A CHILIAN BEAUTY.

Scarcely a week later, the two friends were ready for their journey and would have started had they not been compelled to wait a short time before the steamer was prepared to sail. The boat they were to take was that huge two deck, sternwheeler, the Illinois, a vessel that had carried many an anxious treasure seeker from New York to the Isthmus, enroute to the gold fields of the Eldorados, of California. So great had been the excitement in the preparations for departure that the young lover had hardly time to think of his disappointment, and was so merry that his companion could not help remarking that the trip had already been of great benefit to him.

When the time came to start on the long journey which was to take fully four weeks in completing, the two voyagers were ready

for it, and were among the very first to embark. In fact they were in their state-rooms a day before the boat was ready to sail, becoming accustomed to their surroundings. The next morning, some hours before the time set for the departure, a carriage drove up to the wharf and a heavily veiled lady hastened on board. She went at once to the clerk, and the young man who was fleeing from the wrath of Cupid received a summons to appear in the cabin. He hurried to answer the call, and was surprised and not a little startled to find himself face to face with the fair Bernice, who had thrown back the heavy veil as soon as she was secure from observation.

The face of the young man darkened as he saw who his visitor was, and a flood of reproaches were springing to his lips, when she checked him with a nervous gesture and a little piteous look.

"I know what you would say—what you have a right to say!" she cried, her voice dry and hoarse with agony. "I have no right to

be here, now that I am the wife of another. You despise me, do you not? I deserve it; for oh! I am miserable. I should have been away on my bridal trip, but I refused to go. I could not bear to have you go away without seeing you."

"I do not see how this meeting can do either of us any good," he said, coldly, "and I am sure it is not of my seeking."

"Why will you not look at things as I do?" she asked, coming nearer to him, a strange light in her eyes. "I offer you love—stay and make me happy."

He made a motion to keep her away from him, but she did not heed him, and flinging her arms about his neck clung to him, kissing him passionately. She knew her power and was using it to the utmost. She was the incarnation of selfishness and would not hesitate to sacrifice him to her own pleasure. He felt the old subtle influence, and was almost powerless to resist her.

"Come, abandon this trip that you really do not want to take, and remain for my sake."

Her tone was seductive, and her breath perfume. "You love me and I—ah! I love you. We can be happy here if we are careful."

He might have yielded had not a sudden thought come to his defence, a thought that no man who loves can resist. He remembered that other, and imagined her whom he now held in his arms as having been polluted with the touch of his rival, and he was saved. Sweet and tempting she might be, the idea was disgusting to him. He turned pale, and thrust her from him, almost roughly.

"You might have others too," he cried. "How could I know that every friend I might meet would not be my rival?"

Even this insult, under which she quivered for an instant, did not cause her to desist from her purpose, and she clung to him again, scorning repulsion.

"Let me go with you then," she cried, beside herself. "Oh I am so tired of this. Give me love again, and let me live. There are other lands where there is life with love for us. Come, say yes."

"Forgive me if I am forced to decline your tempting offer," he replied coldly, with a hard smile of triumph. "I have made other arrangements, and to use an old and well worn saying, 'you have made your bed, now lie upon it. In the meantime, I wish you such joy as you can find in the company of your beloved husband."

"Oh Harl—Reflect! If you go now we may never meet again. Think of the old times—our love—the vows we have made—

"And the vows you have broken," interrupted he grimly.

"I was mad," she pleaded, "I knew not what I did."

"Let us end this," he cried angrily. "It can do neither of us any good, and you much harm. You have broken my heart, and I love you well enough yet to tell you that I will never forgive you. I ask for revenge for the hurt you have given me, and I think I will read it in your future life."

"Don't go yet," she cried as he was about

to leave her. "Remember, that if you leave me now, we may never meet in life."

"God grant we never may," he answered earnestly, as he turned away abruptly, and left her there alone.

She gazed after him with a startled look, and then, almost tottering to the companion-way, left the vessel.

Nothing of much moment happened at the start of the trip and the steamer sped on its course, carrying the two men far away from the haunts they had frequented, and nearer the land that seemed to promise romance to one, and riches to the other. The steamer arrived at Aspinwall, at the northern end of the Isthmus, a little behind time, owing to a leak that had been sprung in a stress of weather, which had necessitated the working of the pumps through the latter half of the passage.

At Aspinwall they were to take the newly completed railroad, which luckily for them was in running order, for the passage by wagon was not a possibility, and the trip on horseback attended with innumerable dan

gers. Many a poor fellow, flushed with hope had left his bones to wither on that dread swamp, his journey to the land of gold but half completed.

With our travelers it was different. A speedy train was ready at any day to take them across those miles of country, and as there was nothing particularly interesting about the swampy town, they took the first opportunity to cross. The trip consumed the better part of four hours, with no stops, and at points the country was beautiful to behold, its flora being especially bright and glowing. At times the road bed was so swampy and low, that the mud as it spurted from between the ties would fly up as the train sped on in such quantities as to almost cover the panes of the car windows.

The train took on two engines some distance from Panama as some rather steep grades were to be surmounted, and a high range of mountains run over and through. Then they ran down grade again, and into the town of Panama, which is an old Spanish

settlement, and in those days had a large share of the high wall built about it still remaining. The foot hills began just back of the town, while the coast was low, a gradual slope commencing at the hills, and running away out into the Pacific, which heaved and rolled as if belieing its name. The houses were all old low structures, very few of them attaining the dignity of two-story buildings. They were built in a straggling course down one main street, and some of the more pretentious residences were higher up on the slope. These were lacking in height, though many of them showed some approach to the magnificent, having broad verandas and were rich in the most exquisite shade, mahogany, rosewood, cocoa palm, and other trees growing in thick profusion.

At the town the train was hurried through, and a large number of people taken out in launches to the steamer *Senora*, a huge three-decker that awaited its living freight about a mile out on the bosom of the Pacific, close alongside of a Spanish, American and Eng-

lish man-of-war. The shore was too shallow to allow them to come closer.

The two travellers would have liked to stop and inspect the old town, but they were not allowed to do so, as there had been a riot there but a short time before, caused by the natives entering into a quarrel with some noisy travelers, and as the home party had received rather the worst of it in the fracas, they had retaliated by attacking the white travelers, and killing several, among them some women and children, the latter by dashing their brains out against the trees. For this reason, the authorities hurried travelers though with all speed. Even then the dark faced, fiery-eyed people, with their frizzy shocks of light brown hair, ran after the boats and hurled stones at the occupants, until they were far out of reach.

The steamer was already freighted, so no delay was necessary, and the huge sidewheeler moved off along the coast toward the southwest. As the shores became more precipitous, as they did farther north, the course

of the steamer was closer to the coast line, and some of the most beautiful scenery imaginable could be seen from the decks. Several days after they arrived at Acapulco, on the Mexican coast, and took in water and also a few more passengers, a fact that did not at first interest the two travelers, as the people with whom they found themselves traveling were not, as a rule, the best of company. The two Americans were amusing themselves, with a large number of the other passengers, watching the naked natives sporting in the water. They seemed perfectly at home in the element, which at that point was nearly fifty feet in depth, and as some of the passengers tossed coins into the midst of them they would dive like shot falls, and soon reappear with the silver in their teeth, and the water running in little globules from their greasy skin.

While this sport was going on a boat put off from shore and was rowed swiftly to the side of the steamer, and a lady and two men taken on board, one of them an elderly gentle-

man, and the other a rather sinister-looking younger man, who might be a Spaniard, judging by his dark skin, and perhaps almost anything else, as these southern nations all look very much alike. It was afterward learned that the people were from Chili, and had stopped off at Acapulco on the previous trip.

The trio were no sooner on board than the bell was sounded, and the great steamer moved slowly off with a swing from the shore. The lady, who had been veiled, stood near the two young men and looked back at the high shores for an instant, then as if to obtain a better view, she drew aside her veil. A moment later she turned to rejoin her companions, who had gone toward the cabin, and as she did so her eyes met those of Ritchie, who was staring at her with a glance expressive of far more than admiration. A sudden flash came to her own splendid orbs as she saw his look and seemed to read it, then she flushed hotly, and covered her face again with the veil, as she hurried away.

He gazed after her in a dazed fashion, and flushed eagerly as he noticed that she turned to look in his direction, ere she disappeared in the cabin. Her glance had disturbed him, how much he hardly knew.

“Hit again, old man!” cried Damon, laughing. “I predict a speedy confusion to the memory of the fair Bernice.”

CHAPTER III.

A BULL AND GRIZZLY FIGHT.

Oreville, California, in the days of 1856 was a large and thriving mining town, far in advance of many of the cities that have outstripped it in the race for population. At the time this chapter opens the little city was but ten months old, yet it had a brick court house, a long, well-built business street, and some 2,800 inhabitants. The town was beautifully situated on the banks of the Feather river, and extended back to where the foothills began to rise from the small plain toward the giant mountains, which throw their shadows over miles of the surrounding country.

The valley was as level as a floor, and aptly fitted for the site of a mushroom city. Out at its edges, and near the river the chapparal brush grew in its almost impossible profusion, while in patches the glossy barked manchinita plant, with its deep red hue reared its

tops above it. The little plain with its surrounding hills was the scene of the liveliest activity at all hours, the days being given over to the work of stripping the earth of its precious metal, while throughout the night, the saloons devoted to the gaming table and the wine room dance echoed the sounds of revelry and the curses of the losing gamester.

So close did the pay dirt reach the town, that one of the richest claims was the nearest side hill which was being washed down, even to the edge of the city. It was here, among all this noise, excitement and strife, that Harlow Ritchie and his fellow seeker after adventure found themselves on the Fourth of July following their arrival in California. They had exhausted the resources of San Francisco, where Ritchie's uncle, John Sexton, had done the honors, and then accompanied them to Oreville, where he had a claim. This uncle was a somewhat peculiar person, who was known throughout the state for his oddities. Once seen he would hardly be forgotten. He was thirty-nine

years of age, and as much a youth as his young nephew, although his appearance belied him. His hair had turned gray at twenty, and was now a light ashen color, while his mustache, which he wore quite long, had in it not a single white hair. He was undeniably an interesting looking man, although not handsome. He was deep-chested and built not unlike his nephew, but in a coarser mold. He had a large laughing blue eye, that never failed to win confidence. His jaws were rather square and set; his nose had a little tendency to turn up, but had changed its mind before the fact became too apparent. On the whole the man would impress one strongly.

On this particular day, Oreville was in a high state of excitement. The sturdy miners very seldom had any opportunity offered them to enjoy an amusement other than that which could be found at the gaming table or in the bar room. Luckily, however, on this particular National holiday an enterprising Yankee, who invented the name of Don Jose

Caplero for the purpose, had arranged for a day of sport that, while it was brutal, was just the thing to catch the people in those days. This enterprising showman had secured a huge grizzly bear, which was secured in a heavy iron cage, and had been on exhibition for some time in front of the principal hotel. A fine young Spanish bull had also been purchased, and could be heard at times letting out fearful bellows from the corral. These two animals were to form the principals in the combat.

Near the river at the edge of the little city a large enclosure had been built, about a hundred and fifty feet in diameter. Inside of this was a circle built with heavy posts, to which four-by-four scantlings were spiked a little distance apart. Between these the seats were arranged, high enough to give a good view of the scene of carnage.*

*This brute battle actually occurred on the date and hour named, in the same locality as given here, and precisely as described. Those who were present on that memorable occasion will remember the scene.

Already people on the street were beginning to exhibit a sort of feverish impatience, as they always do on occasions of special magnitude. The novel combat had been much talked about and coin had been wagered freely upon the result, so it was no wonder that the people watched the sun to see how the day wore away and the hour set for the event (three o'clock), drew near.

The three men in whom we are the most interested were seated in front of the hotel shortly before the hour, watching the people as they flocked to the corral. Though the country was comparatively new, there were a large number of women in town, many of them it is true of that class that are not supposed to be worthy of respect, yet there were some few who had accompanied their families, resolved to brave even the dangers of a mining camp in the search for gold.

They had been discussing the contest, and were just preparing to go with the others to the corral, when a brilliant couple were seen approaching from the

distance ; a man and woman mounted on a pair of buckskin mustangs, the fancy trappings to the saddles catching the light of the sun and throwing a brilliant glitter as they rode by. The lady was clad in a rich Spanish costume, and as they passed the trio, she turned her face, and Ritchie, at whom she looked pointedly, fired up and bowed as if impelled to do so. She let her large lustrous eyes look down while a wave of color passed over her cheeks, then she returned the salute, but slightly. Her companion flashed a look of anger at the bold stranger and muttered a bitter invective.

"There she is again, Harl," cried Damon, "You can not escape her."

"Who is she?" asked Sexton. "It seems to me that I have seen that face before. Somewhere in 'Frisco I think, perhaps a 'look-out' at one of the gambling saloons."

"I hope not," said Ritchie. "She is too beautiful for such a fate. We saw her once before as that same man and herself took the steamer at Acapulco. We tried to catch a

glimpse of them afterward, but they remained out of sight until we reached port, when we again saw them for a brief time. It is my opinion that there is some mystery in connection with the whole affair. This fellow seems distasteful to her."

"That's a lover's argument," said Damon, winking slyly at Sexton. "You see how badly he is hit."

"I should hope not seriously," said his Uncle, a little anxiously. "I wouldn't mind a little harmless sport in that direction myself, but nothing serious, my boy, nothing serious, if you love me."

"Come," said his nephew, changing the subject, "we will be late for this Spanish butchery, if we do not start soon."

They had secured their seats in advance and were therefore well provided for when the sport, if such it might be called, commenced. In spite of himself Ritchie could not help looking about in search of the woman who had so interested him. He saw her at last seated a short distance away and

in the front as they were also. She perceived him at once, even before he had discovered her, and though she did not appear to recognize him openly, he was made aware by a flutter at his own heart, that she felt his presence.

There was no time for sweet thoughts however, for the men in the pen were preparing for the show, and there was a perfect babel of voices about the enclosure. They had fastened a long chain to one of the hind legs of the monster grizzly, the other end being staked into the ground by a long steel stake. After taking this precaution they opened the door to the cage, and several of the men hauled it away until the twenty feet of heavy chain came taut, when it drew the bear from his confinement onto the sand of the arena.

As the huge animal was dragged out he uttered savage growls, and turned and snapped at his enemies as if he would annihilate them, at which that portion of the populace who had their money up on Bruin, gave a loud cheer. As the cage was dragged away Bruin tore at the ground in a rage and made

a hole almost large enough for him to crawl into, and then rocked from side to side and contented himself with looking supremely savage.

The bull was next led in and appeared in no way less savage than his companion in arms. He tore at the ground and appeared enveloped in a cloud of dirt and sand. His great eyes were blood-shot, and the breath from his blood-red nostrils fairly smoked, as he glared in a dazed sort of way at the huge assemblage.

About the arena the people were beginning to partake of some of the excitement that filled the hearts of the beasts in its center. They leaned eagerly forward and their cheeks glowed with an unnatural color, while every eye was fastened intently upon the center of attraction. The three strangers were not quite so carried away with anticipation and were better able to enjoy a little study in human nature; all but Ritchie, who seemed intent upon devouring the Chilian beauty with all his eyes.

It would hardly have been supposed that the little city contained so many people, especially of the female sex, but the bright colors of their dress, principally worn in Spanish style, brightened up the dark mass of male humanity about the closely crowded circle, which was now an anxious throbbing body with but one common impulse, the wish for the sight of blood. On this last morbid object, the women seemed more intent than the men, and uttered fierce little ejaculations, urging the bull, who seemed their special favorite, on to the charge.

The men left the arena, but, strange to say, they failed to unfasten the chain which held the bear. At this there was a decided murmur that increased to a roar from the portion of the audience that had wagered its money on the sturdy brute who looked savage enough to fight the whole assemblage. Before the battle was over, however, it was demonstrated that had the bear been at full liberty the taller animal would have stood but little show. In fact there is some doubt

if an animal lives that could get the better of a full grown California grizzly.

For a short time the two brutes glared at each other, and then there was a fearful bellow, a snort, and the bull charged, while the crowd burst into a cheer and half rose to its feet. As the fiery beast closed with its antagonist, the bear, rolled quickly over on its back and crouched so that the sharp horns went a little above his body, the bull passing completely over him in the mad rush. When the brute recovered himself and turned, making the ground tremble with the stamp of his hoofs, the blood was streaming from the gashes in his head, where the sharp claws of the bear had torn the skin and flesh to the skull. The bear had received a bad bruise from the sharp hoofs of its antagonist, and was in a frenzy of rage.

For a few moments the two glared savagely, the roaring of the bull being nearly deadened by the unearthly howling of the bear, a noise that was too terrible to describe, and which could have been heard for a great distance,

Again the bull lowered his head and made a rush. This time he succeeded in piercing the bear's side with one of his horns and a fearful shriek went up from the wounded animal. The sharp claws did their work, however, and the bull left the ground dyed with his blood mixed with that of his adversary. Up to this time, the bear had been so hampered by the chain that he had had little chance to show the agility which he really possessed. Now, however, the chain was drawn taut as the brute tried to reach the bull who held back ready for the charge. It came at last, and the bear crouched and allowed the bull to go over him. The length of the chain now gave him forty feet to pursue in, and quick as a flash the heavy brute turned, and in a few swinging strides was upon his enemy. The huge form raised itself erect, and the right paw came down with fearful force, catching the bull just above the hip bone and bearing him half down with the force of the blow. The bull leaped away, and the sharp cruel claws of the mountain

monster tore the flesh and sinew sheer from hip to hoof; the brown hide flecked with foam and blood streaming behind where a deep red trail of smoking blood glistened in the afternoon sunlight. It was a fearful sight, yet the people cheered and seemed to enjoy it.

All this had happened in a flash, and the bull turned in a perfect fury. He seemed to realize that his fate was sealed, and that his wound was mortal, for he would certainly bleed to death. The bear was again hampered with the chain, and the bull was upon him, not with the fierce long rush that would carry him over so that the bear could pursue, but down on top of him, goring into the great body, taking the gashes and rips from the powerful claws as if they mattered little.

The bear's belly was pierced full of holes and the legs of the bull were nearly stripped of flesh, while the intestines hung out from a deep rip in the side where the claws of the bear had cut as clean as by a sword. The sight was sickening, yet the people yelled and encouraged their favorites, as if possessed,

and nearly crowded over the sides of the enclosure in their eagerness to lose not a tithe of the conflict.

The battle could not last much longer, and in a few moments the bull tottered away a short distance as if to gain strength, but the great vitality was spent and his fore legs held the shoulders above the ground while the hind part of his body sank helplessly; still he faced his enemy who struggled to meet him, held by the chain. The great cries grew weaker and the short giant frame sank crouching upon the ground.

"Kill them, kill them," cried the crowd, eager for slaughter, "they have done well. Bravo, grizzly. Bravo, bull."

The men entered the enclosure, and a bullet in the head finished the bull. The bear showed more vitality, and it took several shots to lay him quiet upon the ground that was sticky with blood from the conflict. Satisfied at last the crowd dispersed discussing the fight noisily, and quarreling over the merits of the animals.

The meat was sold to those who wished to purchase, that of the grizzly bringing fifty cents a pound. The giant brute weighed a few pounds over eighteen hundred. A fearful antagonist truly, for its claws measured eight inches in length when cut from the paw.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MESSAGE ON THE FLASK.

The next day the slaughter formed the chief subject for conversation, and was carried on to such an extent that the three visitors to the town grew heartily sick of it, and retired to a saloon which was less frequented than the more stylish ones, to get a little rest from the ever same subject. To their minds, the exhibition had been a brutal affair at the least, and they were not ashamed to say so, a freedom, however, that was liable to make themselves disliked.

"I suppose the liquor here is all of the same quality," said Damon, throwing himself down on a rough wooden arm chair, and giving himself up to supreme thoughts of disgust.

"And all of it bad," ventured Ritchie, with a sigh.

"Here, partner," called Sexton to the hardened character behind the rude bar. "Have you any good red-eye?"

"Good?" cried the man addressed, with an oath, "It's all good. Who ever heard of a bad drink of red-eye? You must be green, partners. What do you say, boys?" he said, appealing to a small knot of tough citizens who had just come in.

The new comers grunted a ready assent to the bartender's question, looking with greedy eyes toward the trio seated about the table. Of course an invitation to assist in the great American habit was expected, and in fact could hardly be neglected without fomenting some rather unpleasant discord. So Sexton invited them all to step up to the bar, while his two companions looked on in disgust at the way in which the rush followed.

"What a set of men," said Ritchie. "They look like a section of some band of outlaws, fresh from the theatre of a crime."

"Granted," said Sexton, "but don't take any particular pains to tell them so, for my sake. I don't mind a bit of a row, but I always prefer that it shall be in a good cause."

"Harl wants a little practice in western

discretion," said Damon. "He'll soon learn the diplomacy of the gold regions."

While the friends had been conversing in low tones, the invited company at the bar had begun a noisy discussion that now threatened to assume the shape of a heated argument, and a heated argument in California during those days meant trouble. The three at the table began to wonder if it was not time to be getting away from dangerous quarters, and in fact had half risen, when one of the disputants turned toward them and made a direct appeal.

"Look a hyar, stranger, what's your opinion?" the tough cried, looking directly at Ritchie.

"What does the tender-foot know about it?" growled one of the others.

"Well, I leave it to him," cried the other, doggedly. "Come now, out with it. Me and Bill's made a bet and you've got to decide it."

Ritchie was cornered, and his uncle whispered to him to stand his ground and they would see him out of it.

"Well, what do you want me to decide?" he said.

"Who had the best of that fight yesterday? That's what we've been disputin' about. There's an ounce of dust up, and we want it settled one way or 'nother."

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me as umpire," replied the young man, calmly, "for I am no connoisseur in brutal exhibitions of that sort. Ask me something easy."

The man looked at Ritchie in a manner that showed the deepest astonishment. He was evidently a little nonplused at the bare idea that anybody could hold such opinions, and for a moment it seemed as if he was inclined to treat the answer of Ritchie as a very bad joke. This only lasted for a time, and his brutal face begun to show traces of anger. While his worst feelings were fermenting, the clatter of hoofs was heard outside, and two riders drew up at the open door of the place. Ritchie and his companions saw them at once, and a deep flush came to the face of the former. It was the fair Chilian and her dark faced companion.

The man dismounted,—the maid taking the bridle rein,—and strode into the bar room just as the miner who had been trying to think of something withering to say to the young man who differed from him in opinion, had prepared to explode.

“You’re a sweet-scented tenderfoot, aint yer?” he growled in a wicked voice, his features working with rage. “P’r’aps ye’ve come ’bout hyar to sort ov rev’lutionise the boys a bit. Have’nt got no Sunday school book about yer-eh? Look hyar, boys,” turning to the crowd that was lingering in sweet expectancy. “Jest watch me teach this yere tenderfoot manners.”

He pulled from his belt a dangerous looking pistol as he spoke, and toyed with it lovingly. He was evidently in earnest, and the little party were in for it. Just at this juncture the newcomer interfered, by stepping half in front of the angry brute, and without paying any attention to him, fixing his dark eyes with an unmistakable look of hatred upon Ritchie.

"Harl seems to have made himself disliked all around," muttered his uncle with a little chuckle to Damon. The two friends had said nothing, but were prepared for action. The old Californian had drawn his huge firearm, and was fingering it playfully, where the other faction could not see him.

"I ask your pardon—you haf some trouble, to dis man?" waving his pointed fingers in the direction of Ritchie, yet not taking his eyes off his face. "Again, once more I beg pardon; if dere be any trouble with de gentleman—dat is my affair."

"The tenderfoot was cursing the bull fight, and calling all the fighters brutes. He'd ought to be taught a lesson," growled the former disputant, who was evidently connected with the new comer in some way, for he yielded his right to the quarrel gracefully.

"May I ask de gentleman what es de objection to de bull fight?" said the suave individual, bending his dark brows over his darker eyes.

Up to this time Ritchie had kept his temper. He knew that the surroundings were dangerous, and that discretion was the better part of valor. For that reason he had withheld his usual disposition to fight it out on the slightest provocation. The advent of the new comer, and his evident eagerness to quarrel angered him to a degree. He knew what had engendered the hatred, and saw the object of it all, through the doorway, where the beautiful woman was even then bending from her saddle to caress the neck of the horse she was holding. A flush came to his face, and deep anger to his eye.

"I will give you a piece of advice," he said in a concentrated voice, fixing the other with a burning glance. "Don't meddle in what does not concern you, and leave this man and myself to settle our little affair together—or *you'll get hurt.*"

A rough crowd of men like that, which was gathered in the room, are brutal and careless of life ; but are ever ready to side with daring and spirit ; therefore a loud guffaw of laugh-

ter followed Ritchie's speech, in which even his former enemy joined. The dark face of the foreigner grew livid, and with a movement, snakelike in its quickness, he pulled a pistol from his belt, and a report followed. The smoke had hardly issued from the muzzle of the weapon, before there was a louder detonation from behind Ritchie, and with a cry that was only half uttered the first assailant threw up his hands and fell to the floor with such force, that the glasses in the bar rattled. At the same time Harlow pressed his hand to his left side and, with hardly a groan, slid from the edge of the table against which he had been leaning, and fell in a heap to the floor.

Sexton sprang over his body and faced the party at the bar, swinging the huge pistol before him excitedly. "You all have heard of me, if you don't know me," he cried. "Jack Sexton has held his own before now. Come—scatter!"

Damon was at his side now, his massive form quivering with excitement and a thirst

for vengeance for the fall of his friend, and the barrel of a leveled pistol gleamed in his hand. The crowd cared little for him, however. In that day it was reputation that traveled. Sexton had made one for himself, in the toughest of the early days. Some one cried, "Vigilance Jack," and a scamper followed that cleared the room in short order.

Harry bent over his fallen friend the moment the party were alone,—for all had fled but the bartender—and raised him in his arms, resting his head on his knee, while he felt for the pulsation of the heart.

"It beats," he cried, joyously, as he tore open the shirt and placed his hand on the young man's side.

"It's strange that there is no blood," said Sexton, searching rapidly for the wound. "He should have bled profusely."

While the men bent over the body, the door was darkened for just an instant, by a vision. The woman had heard the firing, and had only waited until the crowd had left the place in such a hurry, when she had dis-

mounted and sprung to the door to see what had occurred. She paused at the entrance for an instant, leaning a hand on either door post, and gazed into the bar.

She saw the form stretched on the floor in a pool of blood, the dark features drawn as if in agony, and a look almost of relief passed over the beautiful face. There was some secret joy in his death to her. Then she saw the two men bending over the prostrate form and she stepped a pace into the room. Just as she did so, the sun burst from a cloud and a broad ray sped through the little window, and lit up the pale face of the young man, glinting the golden locks.

She gave a little cry, and sprang forward, pressing her hand to her heart. The two friends looked up, startled, as she hovered over them, and their looks asked a question.

"Is-is he harmed?" she panted. The voice was music, and her English perfect.

"I think so," said Damon a little harshly.

"This is no place for a woman."

"Do not misjudge me," she cried, "because

I was with him," pointing to the dark corpse.
"Let me see."

In a manner that there was no resisting, she swiftly shoved Damon away, and took the head of Ritchie upon her knees, at the same time smoothing back the curling hair from the forehead. The two men saw the tender glance in the eyes as she did so, and exchanged meaning looks. Her slender hands deftly searched for the wound, and in a few moments a delighted little cry escaped her.

"You stupid men. He is only stunned."

With an excited little laugh she drew from his upper left vest pocket the heavy gold watch he carried, and flung it on the floor. The beautiful timepiece was a wreck, for the bullet had pierced it in the center, and all that remained was a debris of broken glass and bent wheels.

"We must have some brandy, quick," she cried. "Not that," to the bartender, who was about to reach down a bottle. "You have nothing but whiskey in the place. Get me a flask out of that pocket."

She pointed to the quiet body on the floor, and Damon sprang to it and returned with an old-fashioned oval glass flask, holding nearly a pint. The woman held it to the lips of the unconscious young man, filled his mouth with the fiery liquid, and then gently moved her hand over the throat, forcing it down. She held him a moment and then repeated the performance, when a faint shudder in the form told that life was returning.

In a few moments a sigh followed, and the eyes opened. There is something peculiar in the returning to consciousness of one who has suffered some sudden shock. The faculties seem to settle upon one thing at a time, as if a multiplicity of objects were too much to be grasped at once. Strange to say, the first thing that claimed his attention was not the beautiful woman, bending over him with her heart in her eyes, but the flask she held before him.

He seemed to study it with interest, and his lips moved as if he was reading something to himself. Then a startled expression crossed

his features, and his eyes wandered to the face that bent over him. His own colored quickly, and a light came to his eyes that made the fair creature tremble.

"Please take him now," she said, softly.

Damon and Sexton bent over him and raised him up, while the lady sprang away and watched with all her eyes.

"Can you stand, Harl?" asked his uncle.

The young man gathered his faculties, and stood up, wavering an instant. Slowly his strength returned, and he was able to stand unaided, by resting a hand upon the table.

He turned to the fair girl, who had shown such solicitude for his recovery, and the color came back to his face.

"Madam, I wish to thank you for your kindness to a stranger, and almost an enemy." She made a gesture of denial, and flushed painfully. "Forgive me if I am mistaken."

"In being his enemy, you should be the more my friend."

"You have been kind to me," he continued,

"Will you not be so still, and grant me a request?"

"Yes—if I can, and not blush for it."

"Give me that flask, you hold in your hand."

"Only a poor little flask of glass. Certainly, if you wish it. I had hoped you would have asked something of more moment," a little hurt, "but it is yours if you want it."

"Do you not know what that little bottle is?" he cried. "Have you never read it?"

"Read it," a little doubtfully, "No,—what is there to read?"

"What is there to read? THE MESSAGE ON THE FLASK."

CHAPTER V.

A CORROBORATIVE TALE.

In a room well littered with masculine eccentricities, the three men lounged in frontier negligé, that is with a sole garment between the upper portion of their anatomies and the July weather. The windows were opened wide, and the thick fumes from their fragrant pipes gathered lazily in the still atmosphere of the room, and then curled out in a thick blue sheen beneath the window frame, and was dispersed upon the outer atmosphere. It was several days after the excitement of their encounter, but it was evident that they had been engaged in animated, not to say excited conversation.

"It is rather strange that we can not find a trace of the girl," said Sexton, as if following up the thread of the discourse. "I should think that her curiosity would have been aroused by your statement in regard to the

flask ; enough at least to have called upon us for an explanation."

" I fancy that Harl is the most disappointed over her non-appearance," said Damon, laughing softly at the look of annoyance which sprung at once to the face of his friend. He reached over to the table as he spoke, and possessed himself of the bottle which had previously called for such an outburst.

There was nothing extraordinary in this bottle, which was much like other old-fashioned flasks—a flat oval receptacle, of the cheapest kind, with smooth sides, and a short neck. It had been made for service, and was such as hunters and prospectors could easily stow away in their pockets. On these flat sides, however, had been etched with some sharp instrument, presumably a diamond, a number of cabalistic characters, and some scratches evidently intended for a crude map. Damon scrutinized it narrowly, paying particular attention to the map.

" You have been hinting improbable things to us for some days," he said to Ritchie.

"Now that your Princess does not appear to be ready to put in an appearance, why not translate these shorthand characters? For once in my life I am sorry that the study of the phonetic writing was neglected by me, for then we would not trouble you."

"It's rather a Quixotic idea, that of Harl's keeping the secret to himself until the lady should be present," ventured his uncle. "If there is anything in it, we should know at once."

"It is only proper that she should have a hand in the discovery," said Ritchie stubbornly. "It was her property, and she is entitled to a share in the result, if anything comes of it."

"Well, nobody's denying that," answered Sexton. "Go ahead with your translation of these heathen hieroglyphics, and we promise to share. Besides, there's no certainty that the lady will ever be seen by us again."

His nephew grew thoughtful for a moment, while his companions watched him with no little degree of interest. Their curiosity had been awakened by his assertions that the mes-

sage was the key to something wonderful, and they were anxious to be made parties in the secret which the old piece of glass contained. Finally Ritchie took the flask from his friend's hand, seized a pencil, and began to scribble on the back of an old envelope he took from his pocket for the purpose.

"The characters are not perfect," he explained, "some of them being broken in the execution. They have evidently been cut with either a ring or pin, which was set with a diamond."

When he had finished his work, this is what his two companions read:

"Alone and sick unto death, I leave to posterity, the secret of the route to the Devil's gold: the wealth of kings, in one vast mass. Seek and ye shall find. Eight days march from where the Sacramento pierces the Sierras, due northeast, are the brother peaks. Follow the creek in the torrent bed to the cave. Follow the white marks to the goal. Riches beyond compare await you. Pray for August Rutchek."

"The map on the other side explains itself," said the translator. "In the lower left hand corner is a rough representation of the range and the river. Across to the top the route is shown. Those wavy marks across the path are evidently rivers, these are a couple of lakes and those parallel lines are meant for either a swamp, forest or alkali desert. In the upper right hand corner are the mountains spoken of. Nothing could be plainer."

"Unless this whole affair was the rather poor joke of some miner," interrupted Sexton. "It seems altogether too much filled with the romantic to have any foundation."

"I don't know," said Damon. "I am inclined to believe that there is something worth the while in the find. I can give no reasons, but I feel a presentiment that the gold is there. It is enticing, to say the least."

"It is not only enticing, but it is true," cried Ritchie, his face lighting up with a glow of excitement. "I tell you that if we search as this message directs, we will find the

wealth that is described, 'the wealth of kings, in one vast mass.' It is worth looking after."

"Always providing that it is not the result of the poor crazed brain of some disappointed prospector, my dear boy," was the somewhat cold reply of the elder man. "I have seen many alluring things in my day turn out trifles decidedly lighter than air in this mining region. You are both tenderfeet as yet, and will live to take less stock in these maps and routes to vast riches." To show how little he was possessed by the feelings of his young friends, he flung himself upon the bed with a yawn, which seemed to settle the subject.

"So you don't think it worth while to start out upon any expedition in search of this treasure?" ventured Ritchie, his tone revealing the disappointment his whole being had undergone at the rebuff.

"In search of fiddlesticks," was the testy answer. "I gave you credit for a little more sense. No! Unless you prove to me more conclusively than you have to date, that the vast

treasure exists, I will not stir an inch. Besides, I have never heard of this man Rutcheck, and nobody ever heard of the 'brother peaks' he mentions. Seriously, Harl, I would do much to please you, but to follow up this affair would be silly. Give it up."

"Think it over," ventured Damon. He had seen that his friend was terribly disappointed, and sought to appease the feeling.

"Perhaps you may change your mind. Harl and I came out here partly in search of adventure, and what is a few hundred miles more or less? We may find good shooting on the way. Besides, we will be on an interesting exploration at the same time."

Matter-of-fact Sexton was about to give a hasty negative reply, when he was interrupted by a knock at the door, which was only partially open. Instead of answering, he turned his head lazily in the direction of the door, and called "come in."

In answer to his summons, the door moved slowly upon its hinges, as if pushed by a timid hand, and a youth entered the room,

but remained standing by the door, ready to beat a hasty retreat should circumstances require it. The three friends looked upon the intruder with glances in which wonder was not unmixed with admiration. Nor was their surprise extraordinary. The boy who stood before them, in a timid, half appealing way, was one of Nature's most striking pieces of handiwork. He appeared to be about 17 years of age, and was slightly built, yet there was a breadth of chest and hips that while it was slightly effeminate, seemed to promise strength and activity. The hands were trim and slender, and showed no trace of having been accustomed to toil, while the feet which were encased in a pair of riding boots, were all too small for a youth of his healthy proportions. His head was set high upon a well-poised full-throated neck, and was surmounted with a crop of rather long wavy gloss-black curls. The eyes were large and earnest, and of a peculiar dun color, while the brows that arched above them were as finely pencilled as the most stylish

society woman could desire. A nose slightly Greek, red moist lips which trembled slightly and parted before perfect teeth, small ears, set close to the head, a round dimpled chin, and an olive complexion, so changeable that it seemed as if the pink blood would mount to the surface to meet a touch, completed the wonderful picture.

He stood turning a Mexican sombrero nervously in his hand, and as no one spoke, looked about timidly, saying in a voice so musical that it made them all start, as if a lost chord had been awakened in their memories.

"I hope I have not been rude. I asked for your room down stairs, and was sent up here. I had some business—that is, a favor to ask."

"How like—how like," whispered Ritchie, hoarsely, to Damon, who nodded his head emphatically, without taking his eyes from the wonderful face.

Sexton seemed to be the only one who retained enough of his normal condition to be of use in receiving the visitor, and arose from the bed with a kindly smile. "You must

forgive my young friends," he said. "They are evidently wondering at your resemblance to a lady friend with whom my nephew—that's the one over there, the one who blushed—is in love."

"Perhaps you mean my sister," said the boy, softly, his cheeks reddening.

"Ah! your sister," cried Ritchie, stepping forward, a new interest in his tone. "Where is she now?"

"She has gone back to the home in Chili," was the answer, and the flush deepened, as the eyes drooped beneath his intent gaze. "It was she who sent me to you."

"Come then," cried Sexton, heartily, "just you sit yourself down here, and tell us all about it. I suppose it's about the flask. Have a pipe? or hav'nt you acquired the habit yet?"

"I'll roll a cigarette," and the pretty fingers deftly rolled a diminutive quantity of tobacco into a paper, while they all took seats about the table, prepared to listen.

"Why did your sister go back to Chili?" asked Damon.

"She never cared to go from there. The man you killed was her enemy. He had been made her guardian, and by Chilian law it gave him charge of her property, and compelled her to do as he bid until she became twenty years of age."

"And her name?" asked Ritchie, softly.

"Loie de Jantezao. Mine is Julian." He threw away his cigarette—Chilians seldom more than light them—and reached over, possessing himself of the flask. "You told my sister that there was a message upon this. How?"

"The little marks you see, are a manner of writing," said Ritchie, "called short-hand, and which I luckily learned while attending college. On the other side is a map. Here is the translation of the characters," handing him the envelope.

"I have often studied this bottle which has been about our home for some years," said the boy, "and my fancy has often led me to believe that there was something hidden here." He read the message through with

heightened color—that message from the dead.

“You will go, of course?”

Sexton laughed, and the others looked serious. The tone of the question had been almost an appeal. “I think not,” he said. “There is nothing tangible enough about this little flask and short-hand affair.”

“But if I tell you more?” asked the young fellow, earnestly. “For there is more to this than you have heard.”

“Tell us, and we’ll see,” was Sexton’s curt answer.

“I have believed it from the first,” explained Ritchie to Jantezao. “I have never doubted its being genuine.”

“For the first part of my story,” began the narrator, with a flash of his glorious eyes at Ritchie, “I am indebted to my father, for they occurred long before my birth. He loved me very dearly, and often beguiled me when a child, with tales of his travels, which I have since learned had been quite extended. I remember that he had for a constant visitor

at our house, a short, slim, wiry man, well-on in years, and of a nervous temperament. He was with him very often, in animated discussion, and often in my hearing they would talk over their travels, while I listened with bated breath drinking in the interesting stories. This man was well learned in metallurgy, and was a student of no mean ability on almost every branch of science.

“Before my father had met, loved and wedded my mother, he, in company with the other, had sailed to the western coast of North America, in search of treasure, which my father’s friend had insisted was to be found there. For reasons which I never thought to learn, they took a long march inland, over mountains and rivers, and finally came to the base of a group of peaks which seemed to rise suddenly above the surrounding country, like brother giants. In telling the story they always spoke of them as the Brother Mountains. Here their provisions ran low and they were preparing to retrace their steps without having discovered the treasure

they were in search of, when a faint human cry was heard from beyond a ledge of rocks, near which they had passed on the mountain side. The cry startled them, yet they at once sprang in its direction. Nearing the point, a huge eagle bounded from the ground and soared aloft, uttering shrill cries at being disturbed from its prey. The two men rushed to the spot, and raised from the cruel rocks the form of a little babe, scarcely two years of age. I can remember now how the perilous position of the child touched my tender heart while the story was being told. The little one had a dark skin of a peculiar shade, and jetty hair. He was clad in a garment of some peculiar fine material, made from a variety of fibre that was unknown, even to the man who was skilled in botany. This garment was gathered under the arms, with a girdle of *beaten virgin gold*.

"They had some misgivings as to whether or not it was not all a dream, but the evidence remained with them, and was heightened by the cries of the child, which they

had laid tenderly upon a blanket. They would have liked to stay longer and solve the mystery, and my father's friend was beside himself at being obliged to leave the hunt just as they were nearing the goal; but the food was in danger of giving out, and game was not plenty, so they were obliged to set upon their return journey to the coast, resolved to make another trip at some future time, and come better prepared. The girdle upon the child led them to believe that gold was abundant somewhere in the vicinity. The child they concluded was of some Indian tribe, of which little was known.

“ Arrived at the coast, my father was taken ill with a fever, the result of the hardships he had endured, and they embarked at once for home. The child was left with a party who were traveling to the eastern coast of North America by way of Cape Horn. Thereafter my father engaged in business pursuits, which accumulated wealth quite rapidly; he met my mother, and as the years went on he gave up his purpose of returning

to the land of the hidden gold, and the Indian ace. His companion, however, would give him no peace, and after several years, to please him, my father finally fitted him out for a long journey, with money and what else was necessary, and with that, August Rutcheck set out for the land of promise."

"August Rutcheck," cried Ritchie excitedly.
"The same name."

"Yes, and the same August Rutcheck, the Polish adventurer and refugee."

"But why didn't you recognize something strange in the strange appearance of this flask?" asked Sexton, who was beginning to get interested in spite of himself, while Damon calmly smoked his pipe, and seemed equally well prepared to accept any consummation.

"Wait. That is but the beginning of my story. I was old enough to be able to remember now, when my father, worried because his friend did not return, set out to find him. He with the man you killed and two companions, traversed the same

route he and Rutcheck had been over years before, and there, by the side of a stream, found the body, where he had crawled to die, stricken with the fever. He had been dead for months, and details would be sickening. In a pouch at his side they found a rough piece of gold of some size, which looked as if it had been hacked from a mass of the same precious metal. Lying beneath the grinning skull, was the flask, and on the blackened finger sparkled a ring my father had given him, with one stone missing, as you see it now."

Julian drew from his finger the ring, set with a cluster of brilliants in the shape of a star. The three men, now all excitement, examined it eagerly, and noted that a stone at one of the points of the star was gone from its place. The narrative had impressed them deeply, and the faces of the two younger men were flushed, while Sexton, the unbeliever, trembled as he held in his hand the little jewel, that had undoubtedly scratched that message from the dead, and left it as a

heritage to whoever might decipher the meaning of the strange characters.

"Well?" questioned Ritchie, with a long drawn breath. "Shall we go?"

Sexton looked from one to the other of the eager faces for a moment, read the clear eyes of the narrator, in which truth was expressed if it ever was spoken mutely in that manner, and said :

"Yes. I give in to you all. The proof is too convincing."

"And the boy?" asked Ritchie. "Do you wish to go?" laying a hand cordially on his shoulder. He felt a tenderness for him for his sister's sake.

"Oh, if I may," he cried. "It is what I should have asked—it is what I wish."

"Of course he can," said Sexton heartily. "Why, the discovery belongs to him, by right, and if we get anything he should be there."

And that is how the quartette was formed. How different would have been the feelings of three of them, could they have seen the handsome boy, as he left them a half hour

later, turn back towards the closed door, and whisper softly as his eyes glowed with feeling and his breast heaved : " Bless you all, and may the Virgin keep him, the man I love. Forgive the lie, that permits Julian to live by his side, for the sake of the love that Julian's sister bears him."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MASKED QUICKSANDS.

Sexton was a typical westerner, with whom to think was to act. He had been slow to believe the strange disclosures made by the translation of the message, but after he had become once convinced that there was truth in it, he was as eager as the younger men to reach scenes which promised, not only untold treasures for the seeker, but adventures as well. He had been in California since the early days of the gold fever, and had prospected much, but he had never heard of any Indian race aside from the somewhat primitive people who had inhabited the coast, and he was anxious to seek out a race that girded its younger scions with virgin gold. He was filled with the prospector's fever, but in addition to this was the added, and more insidious excitement which follows the idea of a possible discovery which would be a revelation to the world.

Ritchie and Damon hurried on with the preparations, and the boy Julian proved of no little assistance. It was only about a week later, therefore, when the quartette wended its way out of Oreville, leaving the inhabitants of that little city firm in the conviction that it was some new prospecting party, setting out on one of those wild goose chases, upon which so many had wrecked health and fortune many times before. Their departure caused a little ripple of excitement for a few days, and then the event was forgotten, as well as the four people who had gone forth upon the search for gold and adventure.

To the three younger members of the party, the march to the north and through the ever varying kaleidoscope of nature was one continued narrative of the possibilities of the great power of which they never tired. Sexton had been through so much of this mountain scenery, that there was nothing new in it to him, and his whole thought was concentrated upon the ultimate result of the expedition. The others almost forgot the object of the tramp, and gloried in the charms

that Nature was ever unfolding before them in a never ceasing change. The party was a picturesque one in its way, and would have made a pretty picture could it have been photographed as it made its way toward the headwaters of the Sacramento. Each straddled a sturdy burro, and behind were two pack animals of the same breed, which followed with the well known sagacity of this much abused but intelligent race.

Sexton invariably rode in the lead, with Damon often at his side, while a short distance behind, Ritchie rode in close companionship with Julian. There seemed to be some chord of affinity between the two, and before many days travel had rolled behind, this had grown to be an accepted order of march. Even had there been no cause for the trip, it would have been worth the while of the party to have taken it, for it was a sportsman's paradise, through that wonderful flora, with backgrounds often of frowning rocks, from which ever and anon dashed into view miniature cataracts, flinging the cooling

spray on the wings of the summer breeze, full in the faces of the party. Sometimes the route led by limpid pools, that glassed the fleeting clouds overhead, while beneath, the watchful eyes of the mountain trout stared up at the strange beings who bent over the vine-edged banks, to sip from nature's own goblet, the pure water of the mountain streams. The burros always quickened their pace when they scented these spots among the foothills, and buried their tan noses deep in the water, sometimes within a few inches of the face of their rider.

Wild game was plenty, and many a shot was taken at the mountain sheep, antelope, or deer, and at times the springing jack-rabbit was not scorned, for it made a savory morsel for the evening repast when the tired party was ready to encamp for the night.

Damon was an inveterate angler, and he had a line and book of flies in his pocket, which he took great pleasure in using. He would beg that they camp by the side of some mountain stream, that he might try his

luck with the fly in the early morning. Then he would cut himself a slight pole from some young tree, and land a few of the finest trout in the world, those of California, which a few minutes later, would be simmering and sputtering in the frying-pan for breakfast.

The long days of travel gave ample opportunity for extended conversations, and Ritchie grew more and more charmed with Julian, as he grew to know the treasures which the mind of his companion was ever making manifest. He found that he could carry on a conversation on any subject, and that he had mastered the contents of many a book with which they were both familiar. He was curious to know where Julian had received such a really brilliant education, and how he had acquired his perfect pronunciation of the English language, which he had first noticed in the speech of the sister. The boy informed him that they had been under the tutelage of an old English professor for some years, who had taken up his residence in South America for his health. They had made it a practice

to converse with him in his own tongue, until he had pronounced them proficient in its use.

The three friends were quick to see that the young fellow was possessed of little of the coarseness peculiar to some young men of the States, and his apparent innocence was such, that he shrank and blushed whenever Sexton, who had passed much of his life among a rough class of men, gave vent to an oath. They soon learned to favor him in that respect, and were as gentle and careful that nothing vile came to his ears, as if he had been some innocent girl. He seemed to notice it also, and it gave him a growing confidence in them that soon ripened into real affection, which was heartily returned on the other side.

"I can't help liking the cub, in spite of his girlish innocence," said Sexton one day, "and am not at all sorry that we have him with us."

"I find him as refreshing as an iced mint after a night's spree," Damon had answered, heartily.

This was the state of things when the party had pierced the Sierras, and leaving behind the inspiring rugged scenery of the great mountains, began to wend its way among the foothills of the eastern slope, to arrive shortly after at the spot where was the real beginning of the route mapped out on the flask, an enlarged and more perfect copy of which Sexton had made, and carried handy for reference. Here one afternoon, eight days after their start, having traveled about 125 miles, the latter part of the journey through the mountains having been most tortuous and slow, they camped for the balance of the day, having relieved the burros of their loads and saddles, allowing them to roam at will and nibble at the grass, which grew in rich profusion where the land was well watered by the mountain springs.

Sexton and Damon took their rifles, and wandered out from the camp, to see what they could find in the way of game, while Ritchie and Julian remained behind, the former loling beneath the shade of a tree and enjoying

his pipe, while the latter lay at his side, prone upon his face, his pretty chin propped up on his shapely hands, the elbows resting on the soft grass.

"Why is it that whenever I try to draw you into conversation about your sister," Ritchie was saying, "you invariably try to change the subject?"

"One doesn't always want to be talking about one's sister," was the reply, given with a little tremble to the voice, and a startled look in the great eyes. "Would you?"

"Did she have a lover?" questioned he, unheeding the inquiry.

"No—oh! no—that is I never knew that she ever preferred any young man." The boy was evidently ill at ease.

"Now look here, Julian," said Ritchie, earnestly. "You are not acting square with me, to use a California expression. I have taken a fancy to you, and treat you as if you were my own brother. Why can't you be honest with me? You act as if you were trying to conceal something from me. Are you?"

"No. Why do you ask so much after my sister? I never heard her speak much of you."

Ritchie winced a little, and he looked the disappointment he felt at the stab. "I could hardly hope that she would," he replied after a time. "She had hardly seen me, to know me. Let it pass. I apologize to the brother, for having thought too much of the sister. Women are not worthy of much thought at the best."

"Why? I have always been taught to look upon them as the lights and ornaments of this world. What cause have you to speak as you do of them?"

Ritchie blew a cloud of smoke into the air, and reflected for a moment. He was in a blue mood that afternoon, and felt that he needed a sympathizer. In a hurried sort of way he plunged, therefore, into a recital of his wrongs at the hands of the worldly coquette, and told his listener the whole story. It was as well that he did not watch his companion narrowly during the recital, for he

would have seen that which would have caused him to wonder greatly. The expressive face was a study, in which anger, pity, and jealousy were combined. At times the small frame shook with some suppressed emotion, and the breath came quickly from the compressed lips. After Ritchie had finished and turned his eyes upon his listener, the remark came in a constrained, cold voice:

"You seem to expect a free heart from a woman, and yet confess yourself calloused by a deep and lasting wound. It is not so I would approach the woman I could wish to win."

Ritchie looked up in surprise, as the boy rose to his feet and turned coldly away. Here were strange words to come from one so young. Yet, perhaps these southern races had a knowledge of such matters at an earlier age than those of northern lands. Before he could answer, the boy had left him, and was out of hearing at the other side of the camp. A coldness followed between the two friends, which lasted some days, and resisted at

first all of Ritchie's well directed attempts to patch it up. He looked upon it as a way the boy had of championing his sister's cause.

The next day the route was resumed, and the morning of the second day they reached the river marked upon the map. It was little more than a creek at that point, and was easily forded. A few miles further on it took up its course running in an opposite direction to the Sacramento, and in the line of their route, so they followed it for two days, until the lake into which it emptied was reached, with the other lake showing upon the map, some miles to the right. At the upper end of the lake could be seen two high peaks of a group of mountains, while still farther to the northeast, another cluster of points pierced the hazy distance. Game was abundant about this lake, and some hours were consumed in procuring fresh meat for the larder.

A few miles further on, the banks of the lake were left far in the distance, and the party pursued its way over an arid desert. They had bottled a sufficient quantity of

water for drinking purposes, but the hot sun shining upon the baking ground created a raging thirst among the burros. They kept to their course after sundown, in order to pass over the inhospitable part of the country as soon as possible, and just as dusk was approaching the intelligent animals pricked up their ears, and those with the packs started off at a brisk gallop. The riders followed as closely as possible, and finally in the distance a field of long green grass spread over the plain, beyond which was a lagoon. Julian was now in advance with his burro, and shouting merrily for the rest to come on, he urged the little animal still harder. On went the beast and rider, the balance of the party following as rapidly as they could. The leader reached the edge of the green carpet of verdure, rushed into it, staggered, and nearly fell from the softness of the earth, struggled again, sprang ahead a short distance, snorted, floundered on once more, and finally, with a piercing bray, caught and sank up to its belly.

In an instant Sexton had snatched a lariat from his saddle-bow, and crying, "The quicksands!" rushed out upon the treacherous earth as far as he could with safety. "Roll off!" he yelled to the now thoroughly startled boy, who with quick intuition obeyed him, having the sense to roll over several times, out of the way of the floundering, braying ill-fated burro. Damon and Ritchie had their hands full with keeping the pack animals from rushing out on the treacherous soil after the enticing water which gleamed in the distance. Ritchie's heart was a huge lump in his throat as he saw the boy's plight, and was powerless to assist him. "Watch out!" yelled Sexton to the boy, and with all the force of his sinewy arm, the lariat flew, its noose well within reach of the young fellow. "Grab it!" called the miner, and in a twinkling the boy had pulled it to him, and passed the noose over his shoulders, just as his body was beginning to settle in the fearful depths. The strong arms of the sturdy man hauled firmly but tenderly, and in a few

moments the boy was safe in the arms of his friends, though a little moist and begrimmed with the soft mucky earth. Meantime the shrieking burro had disappeared from sight, the last bray from his throat sending the mud into the air as he sank from view.

By skirting this grass and muck-covered quicksand for a short time they reached a puny stream running into the lagoon, through the grass, which furnished sufficient water to satisfy the famished stock. Sexton was in favor of giving his burro and saddle to Julian for the balance of the journey, but that youth insisted that he had often ridden with a blanket. So the packs were taken apart and divided, making a load for one animal, the balance being left where it might be of use on the return. Julian was given a thick soft blanket, and the march was resumed. The event cast a gloom over the party for some days, however. It was their first accident. Did it bode ill for the future?

Ritchie remarked that there could be no doubt but what they were on the right road,

for he averred that the quicksand was marked upon the map by the parallel lines. The fifth day's march brought them to the last lake mapped out, and they skirted this keeping it on their left, the ground growing rapidly higher as they approached the mountains which rose before them. A glance at the map showed that these were not the ones they were in search of, so on the morning of the eighth day, after taking a six hour's rest, they turned off a few points to the east, and made for the peaks which rose in the distance, and two days after, tired but hopeful, encamped at the foothills of the Brother Peaks, which towering far above their heads, seemed to pierce the clouds.

There was little sleep that night, and the time was passed until far into the morning, listening to the stories of Sexton, who revived all the tales he had ever heard of fabulous finds of gold, and fortunes made in an hour by the persevering and undaunted miner.

CHAPTER VII.

PROBING EARTH'S SECRETS.

Nature in all her primitive and overwhelming grandeur, as she appears before the ruthless hand of man blasts her handiwork forever, confronted the party as the next day dawned, showing them the frowning mountains beyond the single line of abrupt foot hills, which was all that broke the surface of the lovely plain, until their sides were reached. High overhead a pair of huge eagles soared, awakened by the early dawn, searching with their piercing eyes from that dizzy height for their morning repast. A wind had arisen during the night, and dark clouds hovered over all, the trees on the mountain side sending down a moaning sound, as the infant tempest swayed their tall tops and pierced every canyon on the mountain-side. It was a weird day, and Julian, excited as he was at the near approach to the fulfillment of the quest, shiv-

ered with an undefined dread, and involuntarily turned to Ritchie for the support of his courage.

"The bed of the mountain torrent should be about the base of these hills," said Sexton "It must pierce them somewhere."

"We might divide the party, and skirt them, in opposite directions," suggested Damon. "It would be the quickest way."

"Why can't we all go together?" asked Ritchie. "It is lonely enough about this forsaken country, and the day is dismal. Besides, a storm might arise, and separate us."

"We have plenty of time," mused Sexton, after a pause. "Besides, the young fellow seems frightened at the prospect of the separation of the party, so I guess we had better keep together."

"I am not frightened," insisted Julian, ashamed that they should have noticed any timidity on his part. "You may do just as you think best about it."

"Well, come on," said Damon, who had been an amused spectator of the exhibition

of uneasiness on Julian's part, throwing one leg over his burro's back, and sliding himself after it. "We are wasting time."

So off the party started with him in the lead, and Sexton following him soon after, toward the north, keeping the foot hills to the right of them as they passed along their bases. The way grew more broken as they kept on their course, and the country had more the aspect of a rocky desert, save for the giant trees, the roots of which must have drawn their moisture from deep down in the ground. Care had been taken to fill a cask, on the back of the pack mule, with fairly good water before they started, so that they could give the animals sufficient to quench their thirst, which was not great, as the morning was cool.

It was the second day after (they had traveled but slowly, owing to the difficulty of going in a direct course), that they came upon a deep ravine which burst upon their view after passing around a precipitous cliff. Out from this ravine was a gulch that wound far

away to the left, and to the right appeared to pierce the hills, to the very base of the mountain itself. At its bottom was a winding, pebbly way that had evidently been traced by a small stream, but it had dried up long since, except for here and there a little spring that bubbled from the cliff side, and after running for a few feet, was swallowed up by the parched and thirsty earth.

They could not repress an exultant shout as this proof of the correctness of the message burst upon them, and they at once turned the burros down the most inclining side of the gulch, into the bed of the dried torrent, and then made their way toward the hills through which it pierced its way, the gravelly footing making a fairly good road. Once through the hills the cut became more steep, and the climbing was difficult, even for the mules which are accustomed to such work.

On and on, still mounting, the party wended its toilsome way, until a turn in the gulch gave to view a solid cliff wall, at the base of

which the gulch seemed to break itself, to be pursued no further. The wall as it rose before them was of a white glittering granite substance, several hundred yards in area in which no crevasse appeared, giving it the appearance of one huge rock, lying imbedded in the mountain side. The junction of the gulch with this wall was filled with trees and other verdure, of a size which showed that ages must have elapsed since a torrent had dashed down that rocky bed to the plains and valleys beneath.

They glanced at each other in undisguised disappointment, and seemed to think that they were either on the wrong track or else there was nothing in the whole quest. They hastened on, however, and finally halted their tired steeds in the edge of the thick growth. They dismounted, and looked blankly at each other. The clouds had thickened, and hung in lowering masses overhead. The wind sighed and whistled through the canyons, and often the noise of a cracking branch was followed by the echoing reverberation caused by

the dislodging of a stone as it was hurled to unknown depths beneath. Below for miles stretched the foothills and valleys they had left behind them, and in the dim western distance the plains stretched away for miles. They looked abroad, and solitude greeted them everywhere. The soaring eagles had disappeared, they were the only living creatures in that vast uninhabited domain.

Damon was the first to break the oppressive silence. "We are here," he said, sententiously. "But the cave does not seem to materialize. Evidently the latter part of this programme has miscarried somewhat."

Ritchie was disappointed, and Julian hung near him in youthful sympathy; though he did not speak, his great eyes looking questioningly at the face of his favorite. Sexton seemed undismayed. The last to be possessed of the desire to fathom the mystery of the flask, he was the first to take new courage. "Now we are this far, I intend to go to the very end. Wait here, and I will penetrate to the wall." He seized his rifle, and disappeared

beneath the shadow of the trees, They seated themselves upon convenient rocks, and waited. No word was spoken. The disappointment was too keen. They could hear the crackling of the twigs as Sexton worked his way deeper into the gloom, then for a time all was silent. Presently they heard a shot, and then a shout from him. Ritchie and Damon sprang to their feet, and broke into the dense growth, but they heard Sexton's cry for them to wait, and he soon appeared rifle in hand.

"The cave! the cave!" he cried excitedly, "I have found it. The torrent bed pierces the mountain. The stream once came from the mountain itself."

"What made you fire?" asked the three in a breath.

"A grizzly disputed the right to possession," he answered with a laugh, "so I ended the dispute by shooting him. I was lucky enough to find a vital spot with the first fire. More luck than anything else, for I was too excited to aim to a nicety."

There was little more attempt at conversation. The discovery of the cave on the very verge of disappointment filled each member of the little party with a repressed excitement, which could only find vent in immediate action. The pack mule was at once relieved of his burden, the saddles taken from the others, and they were turned loose upon the mountain side, to get such scanty picking as they could before their masters should again emerge from the cave. The cumbersome rifles were left behind, with the exception of one carried by Sexton, who was the best shot, to guard against the possibility of another bear being in the cave. All took their navy revolvers, however, and a prospector's hatchet hanging from their belts. A coil of rope, a lantern for each, and a few pilot biscuits to munch on, with their water bottles, and a miner's pick and shovel, completed the outfit. Hardly stopping to glance at the world they were leaving behind them, the party penetrated the dense growth in feverish haste. Damon paused a moment at

the mouth of the cave to look at the body of the huge bear, remarking that he would have the feet of the brute for a roast that evening, then disappeared to follow his companions.

The entrance was low and narrow, and in the past, if the torrent had rushed from its mouth, as they thought, it must have come with a rushing, foaming force that should have been grand could it have been seen. Once inside, probably a hundred feet, a high vaulted cavern reflected their shadows in fantastic shape against its black walls, the upper confines of which were lost in distance. Their voices seemed hollow, and filled with a multitude of echoes, yet the place was dry. Three hallways opened from this cavern, and upon examination, the one to the left was found to be marked with a white cross, with some chalky substance, with the consistency of gum, probably some rock from the inner caverns.

"The sign," said Sexton, in a matter-of-fact way.

The others examined it, and then followed

him as he led the way, stooping to avoid hitting his head against the low ceiling. It was a fearful journey, often leading through narrow corridors where they were obliged to almost squeeze through, at times crawling upon hands and knees through low causeways, then skirting a subterranean chasm, down which the crumbling rocks would fall, the rumblings echoing until they had passed out of hearing.

"It's lucky none of the party are troubled with a superabundance of *avoirdu pois*," remarked Damon, with a laugh; but the laugh was echoed in a mocking way, which killed any smile which might have been coming at its birth.

Sometimes they were confronted with a multitude of diverging openings, but always that white cross, which glittered in the light of their lanterns pointed out the right way. After fully an hour of this toilsome journey, they emerged into corridors of a different formation. The black walls were left behind, and a most beautiful sight was presented to

view. Walls and domes of this wonderful place were a mass of glittering stallactites, while their way had to be picked among the multitude of pyramids of the same formation, which had piled up with ages of that constant dripping. Fantastic shapes, often like huge birds and beasts, were made by the action of the lights upon the masses, and when some of the metallic substances at their belts struck against one of the hanging crystals, a musical ring was the result.

Once they came to a low place, where a ditch had been dug in the clay (the work of Rutcheck) to allow of a passage beneath a huge overhanging rock that dropped in a menacing manner from the heights above. It was a startling sensation to crawl beneath the mass, that seemed ready at any moment to fall and crush them. The hearts of the men had a bad way of coming into their throats, and it was no wonder that Julian choked a little, and trembled as he kept close to the side of Ritchie. "Keep up your courage, my boy," he said, "there is no danger," and

Julian would answer by a pressure of the cold little hand, which trembled with the effort to keep calm.

The time passed swifter with the ever varying kaleidoscope of magnificence, for there was ever something new to rest the eye. Caverns and chambers were passed through which the hand of Nature, unseen by man for ages, had fashioned fit for a King's occupancy. No mortal power could have conceived, or if conceived, have fashioned such marvelous things. Chambers covered with mineral flowers, in every hue of the rainbow, were there in numberless profusion, and no two presented the same aspect. The imagination could never depict a scene of such magnificence and grandeur as was presented to the view of the daring travelers. If for no other than this splendid scene of natural beauty, they were well repaid for their toilsome march.

Several times they grew tired and were obliged to stop and rest. The air seemed oppressive. There was that sense of numb-

ness that comes to men in such confined places. Then they grew hungry, and ate a few of the crackers which they had taken with them. The time wore on, and still they were apparently no nearer the goal than before. Their eyes grey tired of the sights, and a vague fear oppressed them. Sexton looked at his watch. It was ten hours since they had penetrated into the cave, and still that inevitable white cross confronted them wherever the cavern diverged.

"There must be an end somewhere," growled Damon. The excitement was wearing off, and a fearful sense of fatigue crept over them. They wished they had brought blankets, and more food. It must be night now, outside, and there were ten hours before them on the return. At last, when even Sexton was beginning to get a little frightened, they emerged from a long corridor, into a vast circular cavern, with a floor of fine gray clay, and the lights flashed about the walls. There was no outlet. The fluttering of wings came to their ears, and a dark object passed over-

head. They held their lights high above their heads, and saw glittering in color, outlined in stalactites against the wall, the form of a huge devil as he is pictured in human cartoon, his form bent over, one huge arm with extended finger pointing to the floor at the very center of the cavern. Speechless with awe, the eyes of the four human beings turned in that direction; and there in the center of the floor, which was hollowed out like a huge basin, arose a dead yellow mass, that sparkled like diamonds in places. Every form shook with excitement, and they stood as if rooted to the spot. Then the lantern Julian held fell to the ground, and with a little moan, he swayed, and would have fallen had not Ritchie caught him in his arms. He had fainted under the nervous strain.

Sexton rushed forward and sank upon his knees before the mass, passing his hands over it feverishly, while his eyes glittered in the lantern light.

"The Devil's Gold!" he cried, hoarsely.

"It was no dream. The Devil's Gold at last. The wealth of kings, in one vast mass."

Damon said nothing. He stood there with his brows knit, and looked from the boy in Ritchie's arms, to Sexton, He was thinking. Was this the true philosopher's stone—the secret of all joy, or was it the touchstone to all human crime and misery. The Devil's gold. Was it lying there, a buried lesson, telling in huge cartoon, the story of the world, telling in its true hideousness the real story of life, love and power? or was it all a dream, like that world itself?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEVIL'S GOLD.

For some moments there was silence in the depths of the mountain cave. Damon still stood with his arms folded, while Sexton gloated over the heap of precious metal, and Ritchie busied himself with the effort to bring the boy back to consciousness. The light from the lanterns, still alight, threw the shadows of the human occupants of the cavern in fantastic and grotesque outlines against the gleaming walls, and the silent but huge form seemed to rear itself, and bend over them in a menacing way, as if gloating over the accession to its domains of the party of mortals. Finally Julian was restored to consciousness, and speech supplanted the term of silent wonder and surprise in the breasts of the three men. Damon and Ritchie seated themselves on the floor of the cavern, but Sexton would not be

content until he had made some investigations as to the extent and quality of the huge nugget which protruded from the clay and sand, in an irregular mass, fully five feet in height, and about five times that in circumference.

"Well," said Damon, at last. "It is here. There is no question about that."

"Here!" cried Sexton, with sparkling eyes, "I should think it was. This is the biggest mass of virgin metal the world has ever seen."

"What is it worth, do you think?" asked Ritchie.

"Now there is a child's question for you," cried his uncle, fondling the rich mass before him. "To answer that would require a problem in mathematics, at which you are much better than I am."

"Get out your note-book, Harl," said Damon, "and let us estimate the enormousness of our find."

"Can't you guess at it?" queried Julian, to whom a problem loomed up as a wearisome matter.

"Hardly, my son. Come, Harl, get out your pencil, and do some figuring for us."

"Bring the lantern a little closer, Julian," said Ritchie. "Now fire your figures at me."

They all gathered closely about him, the lantern-light bringing the faces out in bold relief against the blackness of the cavern. Ritchie poised his pencil above the paper, and waited for his uncle to speak.

"To begin with," said Sexton, "gold is worth a fraction over \$20 an ounce. That bare assertion will hardly give you an idea of the value of this mass, will it? Make a guess at the number of cubic feet in the part exposed."

Ritchie figured for a moment, and answered, "Something over fifty, I should judge."

"A cubic inch of gold," continued his uncle, "weighs about ten ounces, and is worth a little over \$209. Will that give you a sufficient basis for figuring?"

"Plenty," was the answer. "Wait a moment," and the pencil flew rapidly over the

paper. Suddenly he looked up with an awed expression, and said in a husky whisper: "It is impossible. My figures give the sum of \$18,057,600. You are joking."

"Not in the least," chuckled Sexton, while the others seemed awed by the magnitude of the sum, "It is safe to say that the Devil's Gold is worth at least \$20,000,000. About two-thirds of the product of the world for the past year."

"Are you sure it is gold?" asked Julian, after an eloquent pause.

"It isn't copper," chuckled Sexton, "and I am too old a bird to be caught with any other chaff. No it's gold safe enough."

"Do they find chunks like this very often?" asked Damon.

"Not much," cried the old miner. "I have in my mind now some of the larger ones. There was the Blanch Barkley nugget, found in Australia. It weighed 146 pounds. One was unearthed at Ballaratt, weighing 184 pounds 8 ounces, and paid \$41,000. One was discovered in North

Carolina, weighing 37 pounds troy, and lately at Carson Hill, California, a mass containing part quartz, was dug out, weighing 160 pounds. Compared to this they were all pigmies."

"How in thunder did this immense mass come here?" added Damon.

"Gold is queer stuff," volunteered the miner. It is distributed all over the world, in different quantities. "It is in the clay of the east in small proportions, and even the sea salt is filled with it, to the extent of one grain to a ton. My theory is, that water has flown through these caverns at some time, and this one has acted as a reservoir to catch in its clay basin, the gold that has washed from the inner crevasses. There has been a circular motion here, which has piled it in a heap in the center, where it has been subjected to the action of natural chlorines, followed by intense internal heat at some time, to melt it together. One can only guess at such secrets of Nature."

"Well, we can't take it with us now," said

Damon, rousing himself. "We had better get out of this place, and make some preparations for removing quantities of the metal some other time."

The others prepared to heed his advice, and make preparations for returning, but Sexton was not satisfied. "I'll not leave until I have a piece of this to take to the light of day with me." With this he seized his hatchet, and began to hew at a projecting corner of the huge mass. At every blow the sharp steel dented it, and as the hammering ceased the light glistening on the shining spot revealed that two converging gashes had been made, and in a moment a good sized piece would become loosened. There was a fluttering of wings overhead, and again the dark body they had observed before, passed in the shafts above; then came a peculiar hissing sound, and as Ritchie raised a lantern above his head, to discover its cause a huge bat circled above them, the extended arm of the weird figure against the wall seeming to urge him on. Twice the huge form revolved

among the shadows and then flew directly at Sexton.

He had seen it in time, and aimed a blow at it with his hatchet. The keen blade gashed deep, and the hiss of the animal grew louder as it drew away. A few drops of blood spattered the floor of the cavern, but the fearful beast did not seem to mind it. Again it came at him, like the guardian of the treasure, seeking to punish the depredation, but this time Sexton had seized his rifle, and as it approached him, fired point blank from a distance of less than six feet. The animal fell with a heavy thud, and the detonation following in that close air was fearful. It seemed to shake the rock beneath their feet, and rumbled away into distant caverns and depths, and the four human beings cowered at the fearful noise.

Suddenly an explosion more fearful than the rest followed, the cavern shook to its walls, the lights flickered and went out, and the cave was filled with a fine dust which made it almost impossible to breathe. The

men flung themselves on their faces, Ritchie recoiling as his hand came in contact with the cold body of the winged reptile Sexton had killed. The reverbration continued, until it was lost in the distance.

"Are you all here?" whispered the voice of Sexton, finally.

They all answered at once. No one was missing.

"Strike a light, somebody," he continued.

There was a movement in the inky blackness. Julian was seized with a fit of coughing, but somehow his hand had found that of Ritchie, and he clasped it tightly, trembling violently. "Don't be frightened," whispered he to the boy.

"No! You are here." There was a world of trust and thanksgiving in the one word.

A match flared in the darkness, and Damon was groping for a lantern. He found and lighted it. The flame sputtered for an instant while he was adjusting the chimney, and then blazed up brightly, blinding the eyes of the startled adventurers by its contrast to the

dense gloom which had preceded it. Sexton found the other lantern and lighted it, and then they gathered together their scattered wits as best they could, and began to look about them. The dust had settled gradually, so that respiration was much easier, and mutual exchanges of questions and answers elicited the fact that no bodily injury had resulted as a consequence of the explosion.

"This dirty reptile has caused us a scare," growled Sexton, kicking the loathsome carcase with his foot, and turned it over on its back. "Here's something new to me in the way of winged rodents."

It was indeed a fearful creature, much the same in appearance as an ordinary animal of its kind, except that the hair on its body was reddish brown in hue. The head was long and peaked, and long twin fangs protruded from either side of the jaw. The ears were longer than in any known species, as were also the nails to the toes. The wings, spread out upon the ground would measure six feet from tip to tip, and the body was as large as

that of a jack rabbit. Sexton poked it into a corner of the cavern beneath the form of the Satan who might have been his master.

"Come," cried Ritchie, let's hurry out of this place. I am pining for the light of day, and we have hours of tramping ahead of us."

Sexton finished the work of securing his sample, and then the four human beings were prepared to retrace their steps to the outer world, from that weird cavern of horrors in which lay the treasure they had sought with so much fatigue. Damon had gone on in advance, and the others had started to follow, when they were startled by a horrified cry from him. They hurried on, and saw him standing a short distance from the opening of the corridor, his lantern above his head, peering at an apparently impenetrable wall in front of him. At his feet was scattered a quantity of debris of rock and clay.

"Trapped!" he cried, before they could grasp the situation. "Trapped like rats in this fearful hole."

They looked at the black wall, and then back at each other in dismay. It was too true. The whole truth of their terrible position burst with full force upon them. Deep in the bowels of the earth they were hemmed in on all sides by the forbidding walls, with no apparent outlet.

"Is this the right corridor?" asked Ritchie.

"It is the only one," groaned Sexton. "There was but one corridor leading into the last cavern."

"The rock has been dislodged by the concussion from the explosion of the rifle," said Damon, "and has fallen from the walls above, cutting off our escape."

"There's no use standing here cursing fate," cried Sexton, vehemently. "We must get to work."

"What time is it now?" asked Ritchie.

"One o'clock," answered Damon, looking at his watch. "That must mean the first hour of the next day."

Few words were spoken after that. The picks and shovels were taken in hand, and

they attacked the mass with a will at the point where it appeared the most vulnerable. The work was slow, for the clay was hard and unyielding. They labored in turn at the task, two working while the others rested, Julian toiling with the rest, though the handles of the tools blistered his tender hands, and his strength was soon spent. They had worked above an hour in this way, when the picks struck against the living rock, and a new point had to be sought. After several hours of hard labor, it was apparent that the fallen mass had completely hemmed them in. They dropped the tools, and seated themselves upon the rocks in the corridor, wiping the cold perspiration from their foreheads.

"It's no use," said Sexton, at last. "We are gone up."

The others did not speak, but a sob broke from Julian. Fear had been supplanted in the breasts of the others by a silent despair. Hope was dead. This was to be the end of the search for the Devil's gold. There they

would die, in that fearful natural dungeon, where ages after, only their whitening bones would be left to tell of their sufferings. Ritchie placed his arm about the form of the young friend, and tried to comfort him. Time wore on, with only now and then a sentence from one or the other. Finally they left the corridor, and went back to the cavern. Sexton stretched a Navajo blanket upon the floor near the huge mass of gold, and they seated themselves upon it, leaning their tired backs against the mass.

After a time the lights flickered and went out. They had forgotten to save their oil, by extinguishing one of them. This made matters more terrible. Soon they grew hungry, and ate a few pieces of pilot biscuit. Sexton had warned them to be sparing of them. There was no comfort to be found anywhere, and they had prepared themselves to die. Then they grew sleepy, and dozed off at intervals. While in one of these short sleeps, Ritchie dreamed a beautiful dream, and thought he was awakened by a woman's

kiss. He was half awake when it was repeated. A pair of warm, quivering lips clung to his. He reached out his arms to the dream friend to find that it was Julian, who had crept close to his side.

"I thought that I was dreaming," he said, "and that I felt angels' kisses upon me."

A low sob reached him. "Don't cry, Julian," he groaned.

"Will we die here?" came the answer, in the form of a question.

"I fear so, my boy."

"Promise me something. Promise me, on your honor, that if I suffer from starvation, you will kill me."

"Don't talk so," he moaned.

"You must. I am not brave enough to suffer."

Just then there was a faint glimmer of light high up above them. The two watched it, and it grew longer and broader, until objects became faintly visible, when with a suddenness that was startling, a brilliant ray shot down upon them, and lit upon the mass of

gold, touching it with fantastic beauty. It was a sunbeam from the dome of the cavern, hundreds of feet above. A cry from Ritchie awakened the others, and they gazed upward, spellbound. Only for a few minutes did it glorify their prison, then disappeared as suddenly as it had come. Damon struck a match and looked at his watch, It was five minutes past twelve. Noon in the great world they had left only the day before.

CHAPTER IX.

RESCUED BY CHANCE.

Two days of horrible captivity in that cavern of gloom followed, and twice more the sunbeam pierced the heavy blackness, lighting upon the golden heap at exactly the same time. Hunger and thirst had attacked them, and their bodies were cramped and weak from the lack of a place upon which to rest them. The water was consumed from the bottles, and the last piece of pilot biscuit had been disposed of. Julian was the weakest, and Ritchie had taken from his pocket the cabalistic flask which he had carried filled with brandy in case of need. As he pressed it to the boy's lips it fell upon the hard floor, and was shivered to atoms. He absorbed the brandy with his handkerchief, and squeezed a few drops between his young friend's parched and swollen lips. It was all the liquid they had left. Julian gradually grew weaker,

and Ritchie pressed into his hand a small piece of the biscuit which he had secreted for that purpose.

"No," cried the boy, in a whisper, "you eat it yourself, I cannot last long."

"You must, to please me."

Without a word he took the proffered morsel, and devoured it eagerly. It was a fearful condition of things, to be slowly dying so near each other, with no way to surmount the inevitable. Sexton arose and stretched himself, walking about the confined space. Mechanically he picked up the miner's pick with which his hand came in contact in his groping, and swinging it aloft in his frenzy, he muttered, "Curses on the gold, and the day we sought it. It has been the death of us all."

With a hoarse oath he let its point come down with a crash upon the floor of the cavern. Instantly there was a rumbling from beneath their feet, which echoed for half a minute. Sexton struck it again, and the same noise was repeated. "There is another cavern underneath!" he cried.

"Well, what of it?" growled Damon, who up to this time had taken matters as philosophically as he could under the effects of hunger and thirst. "What do we care for that?"

"We may find release in that way," answered the old miner.

"How?" whispered Ritchie, eagerly.

"There is one way," said Sexton, gloomily. "We are doomed to die here any way, what matters it if we reach death a few hours sooner. It is a heroic measure, but cannot be worse than our present condition."

"What will you propose?" asked Ritchie.

"We have powder, I propose to blast through."

"And blast us all into eternity, in this confined space," ventured Damon with a hollow laugh. "Well, go ahead. Who cares. As you say, it is sooner or later. Let it be sooner then by all means."

"Are you agreed, Harl?" asked the miner.

"Yes," wearily.

"And the boy?"

"Whatever he says," was Julian's weak reply, indicating Ritchie by a pathetic glance.

Sexton needed no second invitation. He proceeded to sink a hole into the floor at the edge of the gold, as deep as the pick would penetrate, and into this he poured a quantity of powder from a flask. Tearing a strip of his handkerchief, he moistened it with his lips, and rolled in it a quantity, making a fairly good fuse. This he dropped into the hole, letting its end project from it a few inches, placing a stone upon it to keep it in place. As best he could with the sense of touch, he placed a train of the powder about the edge to the other side of the gold, and all was ready.

"Now all crawl as close to this side of the nugget as possible," he said, "and perhaps the gold will save us from flying rock. It is but a chance, and even if we escape unhurt, the cavern below may be too deep to descend into."

They crawled as close to their shelter as possible, and then bade each other a tearful

good-bye, as if that moment was to be their last. Ritchie felt a pair of arms about his neck, and knew that Julian was lying close to his breast. He drew him closer, and then he felt a pair of trembling lips against his own.

"Good-bye, love," said the tearful voice.
"We will die together."

In the excitement of the moment he did not heed the words, nor think them strange. Afterwards he studied them with new light, and they comforted him. Sexton lighted a match, and the feeble flame sprung into life against the gloom. Slowly he touched the end of the train, and it leaped along the edge, emitting a bright blue flame. They looked at each other hastily, in the unearthly light, and the glances of the doomed men were a mute farewell. The fuse sputtered, then there was a shock, and they all seemed to be thrown together. The floor of the cavern trembled, and then the mass of gold against which they crouched drew itself away from them, the clay and rock cracked beneath

them, there was a faint cry from Julian, a cry of despair, and the earth seemed to have left them, as they were hurled into space. Then there was a bright light, a glimpse as of heaving and moving forms, a shock, and then unconsciousness. Was it the shores of the great unknown that had opened before their eyes? and had death come to end their agony?

Julian was the first to regain consciousness. Being the lightest, the fall had not been so much of a shock to him as to the others, and beyond a slight shaking up, he was uninjured. He clambered to his feet, rubbed the dust from his eyes, and the first object which caught them, blinded as they were with the flood of light around him, was the form of Ritchie, partially hidden beneath the heap of dry clay which had fallen with them. In a moment the boy was at his side, and had raised his head to his knees. A feeling of agony was within him, as he saw the closed lids, and tenderly wiped the grime from the face. The action caused the eyes to open, and Julian gave a little cry of delight as he

saw recognition in them. With difficulty he arose to his feet, and pressed the hand of his young friend, in thanksgiving. The unaccustomed brightness blinded them, and it was some moments before they could look about them.

It took but a glauce to tell them that they were in a cavern some fifteen feet in height, and of some considerable extent. A wide cathedral shaped entrance let in a flood of light from the open air, which their nostrils inhaled in great gasps. Near this entrance, gazing at them in wonder, were outlined the shapes of four human figures, clad in flowing robes. Their backs were to the light so that their features were not distinct. The sight told them that they were at least among human beings, and thus that they must be out of their past dangers.

"Let us look to the others," said Ritchie. "I hope they are no worse off than we are from the fall."

Sexton and Damon were lying near, the former with one leg under several pieces of

broken rock, and the latter flung toward the farther side of the cavern wall. It was the work of but a few moments to drag them to the smooth portion of the floor, and examine into their condition. Damon was rather badly bruised about the hands and face, while it was feared that Sexton had been injured internally. Both were breathing faintly though they were unconscious.

Ritchie turned to the robed figures, who had hardly moved in the interim, and spoke in a hurried manner. "Get us some water, quickly."

The forms looked at each other, and spoke hurriedly in some unknown tongue, which Ritchie did not understand. With a quick instinct, he moved his hand to his lips and tipped back his head in a manner indicative of a man taking a deep draught of water. One of the men instantly stepped to a long stone table against one of the walls, and secured a vessel, advancing a few steps toward them, and placing it upon the floor of the cavern. Ritchie seized it, and found that it contained

water. He bathed the face of Sexton with it, Julian performing the same duty for Damon, and in a short time they had the satisfaction of bringing them both to consciousness. Damon was able to rise, though he admitted that he felt sore from his fall, but Sexton growled out that he was hurt, and would be obliged to lie quietly a little while.

The three companions secured several skins with a soft fur, and made a comfortable bed for him, and then took slow and careful sips of the life-giving liquid of which they had been deprived for so many hours. A series of signs sufficed to make the men, who were evidently a little frightened, understand that they were hungry, and food was offered them in the same manner as the water. It consisted of some queer tasting bread, rather dry, several large plum-like pieces of fruit, and a quantity of cold fish. Everything had a queer taste, but hunger knows no plaint, and they partook eagerly, at the same time taking a casual view of their new quarters.

The strange men first claimed their atten-

tion. They were large of frame, and each wore robes of a creamy white, made of some coarse material, which hung in not ungraceful folds, though ample in fullness. Their feet, which projected from the hem, were encased in clothing, half shoe, half sandal. As they moved about, it was seen that the robes were caught at the waist with a metal girdle, and that they flung open at the side, exposing the foot, ankle and part of the leg of the wearer. The sleeves were loose and seamless, being caught at the wrist in a metal band. As the arm was extended, it gave the sleeve of the garment the appearance of a wing. Their faces were slightly swarthy, the hair black, curly and glossy, as was also a not ungraceful beard which each wore in the same fashion. The eyes were large, the features prominent, and the face inclined to be handsome. On the breast of each glittered a round plate of gold, about half the size of a saucer, set with countless gems of various colors.

The cave was partly carpeted with the skins of animals, but the walls in places were

hidden from view with curtains colored richly in various designs, and seemingly of a fine texture. At each side of the room toward the entrance were numbers of various-sized vessels, arranged on stone ledges or tables, set against the walls, but the strangest sight of all was this: In the centre of the cavern, directly beneath the spot whence they had fallen, was a marble base elaborately carved. Upon this, as though in sacrifice upon its destined altar, the Devil's Gold had poised in its descent and now lay gleaming dully in weird harmony with its surroundings. While the adventurers were taking in all these particulars, the four robed figures were holding a low-toned conversation with each other, after which they all advanced nearer to where the others were seated or lying upon the fur rugs, and the tallest of the group advanced a few steps from before his fellows, and began a discourse in a full musical tongue, interspersed with many eloquent gesticulations. He paused after a time, and waited, apparently for an answer.

"He expects us to talk, I suppose," said Ritchie. "Does anybody here understand him?"

"I should rather think not," said Damon. "This is no earthly language. We have passed to the beyond."

The strange men again engaged in animated conversation, and the others watched them narrowly, and not without apprehension. Their actions and countenances appeared anything but peaceful. They were not kept long in doubt. Three of the men drew from beneath the folds of their robes long slender knives, and were about to advance on the four adventurers, when the taller of them seemed to expostulate in an earnest manner. The others evidently would not hear his advice, and came slowly forward. Damon looked about for the rifle, but it had been crushed beneath the mass of gold.

"Give it to them if they want fight," growled Sexton, who had recovered sufficiently to sit erect, as he pulled his long navy from his belt. The others followed his ex-

ample, and were prepared to make short work of their assailants.

The three robed men advanced closer, and the four comrades were drawn closely together, awaiting the attack. Suddenly the same ray of sunlight which had visited them in the cave above, burst through the ragged orifice in the roof of the cavern below, and after flickering on its sharp edges, burst full upon the edge of the Devil's Gold, and then lit up the curls upon the head of Ritchie, encircling them with a halo of living gold, while one stray ray fell upon the chiseled ear of the boy who was close by his side. The approaching men dropped their knives apparently in awe, and with the quickness of thought spread their arms and bowed their heads, as if in obeisance to some higher power.

The attacked party lowered its weapons, and gazed in wonder. There was a concerted cry of "Gosah! Gosah!" from the strange men, and then another consultation in that strange tongue of which the others could not understand a word. The result of the ani-

mated talk was, that they withdrew softly from the cavern, making a low obeisance as they did so, and passed into an inner recess, returning shortly with a small flaming lamp of the antique Oriental pattern, which one of them swung slowly to and fro. This the leader moved to the front of the pedestal upon which the huge block of gold lay, and passing the lamp close to it, a small fire was kindled, which soon filled the cavern with a sweet smelling incense. Then they withdrew to the outer air, leaving the lamp and fire behind them, allowing a richly embroidered curtain to swing back into place, closing the entrance.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Damon, with a relieved laugh. "We are not to be mince-meat just yet, are we?"

"We can only have patience, and wait," remarked Ritchie. "It is a hard matter to tell what will come to us later on."

"That sunlight seemed to scare them," said Sexton. "Evidently it has something to do with their form of worship."

"They are Sun-worshippers," explained Julian, "such as used to be natives of Peru. There are many of their descendants in South America, to-day; lineal descendants of the old Incas. The sunbeam was a token from their deity."

"But how on earth came they in this part of the country?" asked Ritchie.

"It's a conundrum," replied Damon. "We have not heard the last of the old priests yet. Let us wait and see."

"Or lift yonder curtain, and look out upon this country that breeds antediluvian specimens of humanity," added the irrepressible Damon.

CHAPTER X.

NAHAECO, AND THE FORGOTTEN RACE.

The rescued men passed out beyond the curtain, and found themselves upon a natural stone platform, the rock overhead projecting so as to form a natural roof above them. From this platform steep steps of granite passed below between green shrubbery to another landing, from which, turning to the left, and passing along the side of the steep declivity, still another flight could be seen, leading to the depths below. It needed but a glance to reveal this much, and then the eyes of the beholders passed in wonder to the sight that unfolded itself before them in the distance.

Stretching to the right and left the cliffs upon the side of which they stood, broadened into the distance. Fully three hundred feet below them stretched a verdant valley. Close beneath them were the white walls of a city,

here and there rearing from its midst minarets and small domes. At one point a huge dome that glittered like polished gold in the sunlight supported a small ball that twinkled and scintillated as if encrusted with gems. Far away in the distance were other groups of buildings, which might be small towns, and between them lay cultivated fields, and feeding flocks. The faint noise of a cataract was borne to them from the depths below, and the glitter of its spray could be seen rising from the tree tops, near the cliff to the right. As far as the eye could see in the bright distance the warm sun illumined the surface of what seemed to be a sea of molten gold. This brilliant expanse they afterwards learned was a sea of quicksands, vast, bottomless and impassible, shutting the people from the outside world on that side, as effectually as the cliffs on the other. Behind it dimly stretched a low, rugged shore, which no dweller in that prison country might ever hope to reach.

The sound of voices came to them from

below, constantly growing louder, and in a short time the forms of the four priests appeared at the lower landing. They came up the long steep steps, followed by a dozen or more men, clad in a different manner, but in other respects much resembling their prelates. The style of dress was somewhat alike. A sort of tunic, large and low at the neck, was laced at the shoulders, and after being crossed over the breast a line of laces followed the border of the right fold. This was pulled up through a woven gold girdle, until the lower edge hung evenly about the limbs, a short distance below the knee. The material was finely woven, and clung in graceful folds, in spite of the fact that it appeared a trifle heavy. Some of the garments were of a bright yellow, while others were blue. All wore the half sandal, half shoe, which came a short distance above the ankle, and was strapped about the front of the foot and limb.

Following them came a quartette of men, evidently guards, for they wore armor composed of vertical strips of a greenish hued

metal, fastened close together, and deftly bent to the form, covering them from the shoulders to the hip, where it was edged with pendants of the same metal. Each wore over his shoulders a short shoulder cape of spotted fur. A low helmet, terminating in a prong at the crown, and a huge spear, together with a broad naked blade at the left side, completed the outfit. This formidable party mounted the steps slowly, and when near the landing halted for a moment to hold a short consultation. Then the priest who had appeared the most friendly some time before, advanced a few steps toward them, and moved his hand over toward the distance, at the same time opening his arms, as if in welcome. Then he motioned to his fellows, and nodded his head, as if to say that they too welcomed them. At this the others also nodded their heads vehemently.

"Quite a sociable lot, are they not?" joked Damon.

"Wait," admonished Sexton, "until we see what's in the wind."

The priest came silently up the steps, and neared the party. Then he pointed at himself, and said the single word, "Umrro," and spread his hands above their heads as if in blessing.

"That is plain enough," said Ritchie. "His name is Umrro, and he has no hard feelings against us."

"He seems to be the right sort of a fellow," ventured Damon, "and I rather like him. I am not particularly fond of that other trio, though."

"They want us to follow them," said Julian.

Such was the case. Umrro took Ritchie by the hand, and led him solemnly down the stairs, and the others followed. The four guards drew themselves to the side of the stairway until all had passed, and then brought up the rear. The way led down a seemingly endless flight of steps, which at times ran along the side of the mountain, and then at right angles. They were steep, fully a foot to each, and Damon averred that

he counted 384 of them. The foot of the flights ended in a fairly wide and well kept street, on either side of which were beautifully ornamented fronts of stone buildings, with a lofty lower story and entrance, and another very low story above it. None of the houses appeared to be of any great height. As they were led along, the populace gazed upon the strange visitants with wonder, often breaking into loud converse among themselves. One or two of them greeted the men of the party in a dignified manner, and after exchanging a few words, passed on.

"I hope this is not a funeral procession, with ourselves as the principals," remarked Damon, airily.

"I feel like a prospective funeral," growled Sexton. "That tumble pretty nearly used me up."

The tramp ended in front of a pretentious looking front, and the party entered through an elaborate doorway, into a hallway or lobby ornate with carving. Through this they passed into an inner court, which was

roofed about its edges with the projecting stone of the roof, but with its centre open to the sun. In the middle of this court, a fountain was tossing its water into the air, which fell in a cooling spray into a huge curbed basin. From this court which was amply supplied with low stone seats, opened numerous doors, which they afterward learned led into the sleeping apartments, and other rooms, which were used in bad weather. As a general thing, the people dined and passed most of their time in the court.

This they were given to understand was to be their future abode, and Umrro went about making himself at home, with an alacrity which proved that he was to lodge with them. They made their selection of rooms, Ritchie picking out one for himself and Julian, but strange to say, that young man refused with an embarrassed air, and asked that he be allowed a room by himself. Ritchie felt a little hurt, not knowing what had come over his favorite. The lad saw the look, and could not answer it, except with a boyish

blush, so Julian was allowed to follow out his peculiar whim and room alone.

These apartments were as cosy as one could wish. The beds were of granite, and low on the floor, but were so aptly carved to the shape that with a few skins thrown over them they were as soft as down. Huge rugs beautifully woven in colors covered the stone floor, and the barrenness of the hard walls was relieved by paintings upon their surface, which, though rather brilliant in coloring, were not badly executed. They represented various scenes in the life of the strange people of which the new comers learned more later on. The house had no opening on the outside, except at the entrance door, and all the light came in through the windows opening in on the court. A stone stairway led to the floor overhead. The lower ceilings were about fourteen feet high, but those of the upper rooms were scarcely seven feet, and were for the purpose of lodging the menials of the household.

From the ceilings of the lower rooms hung

a huge brazen lamp by chains. At night when lighted, a peculiar bright bluish light was given from them, the smoke that came from the flames having a faintly pleasant perfume. The fountain in the centre had a large bronze basin above the lower stone one, and it was in this that the drinking water was caught as it fell, and was carried to the curb in a metal trough. The curbed basin was used to wash the household clothing and also for bathing purposes. Every morning drapery was hung about the fountain to the height of several feet, and at certain hours the men of the household, and then the women were allowed to take their morning bath. Altogether, it was a convenient arrangement. A drain pipe kept the water pure at all times, and it was never corrupt enough to harm the quantity of bright-hued fish, which were one of the chief pets of the house.

Umrro, it seemed, had been allotted them as a sort of chief preceptor, and he selected a pair of the chief savants of the land to instruct the new comers in the strange language of

the people. It was a difficult task at first, for the reason that there was hardly a base upon which to start, the words Umrro aud Gosah being the extent of their knowledge in that respect. The former was the name of their priest, and the latter of the deity, or the Sun Power. Little by little, however, they learned the rudiments, and the rest was not so hard. It was a little awkward at first to master the pronunciation and Damon averred that it would result in lockjaw before he had acquired a hundred words of the vocabulary. Strange to say Julian was the most apt pupil, probably from the fact that many of the words had the characteristics of the Spanish.

One of the first things they learned was that the land they had discovered was called Nahaeco, meaning the walled country, and the inhabitants were Dumachas, or the prisoned people. Meantime, the friends, while they were anxious as to the ultimate end of their exploit, were so relieved by their escape from the fate which had awaited them, that they were almost ready to accept any-

thing. They had learned early in their captivity (if such it might be called), that there was no escape from the land into which they had penetrated, for it had been cut off from the rest of the world, ages and ages ago, when the whole land had been peopled with the forefathers of the Dumachas. According to tradition, and what records had been kept, a convulsion of nature had come upon them when they were a great race, and had cut off one of the principalities from the rest. Perhaps the remainder of the nation still lived about the outer walls of the confined people. That was something they could not tell.

Damón was appointed astronomer in chief to the outfit, and kept account of time and season. Months passed by, and still there was no change in their life. They lived well upon fruits, a quality of bread, a kind of meat they could not guess at, and any quantity of roast goose. There could be no mistaking the latter dish, even without the sage and onions. After a time they began to be able to understand and converse a little, and then

it was that Umrro began to give them an idea of their surroundings. One of the hardest things was to learn the system of figures in use by the Dumachas, but they finally mastered them, and until they did they could not learn of the extent of the race.

Their numerals were arranged something like the problem of the horseshoe nails, so dear to the youth of every school boy. The numerals numbered but seven, and were a somewhat complicated set. Here they are with their corresponding value in decimals:

Alta.	Tujay.	Rahte.	Menha.	Rabo.	Sinle.	Bratchin.
1	2	4	8	16	32	64
—	V	Λ	Z	Ξ	O	E

The Bratchin corresponded to the decimal hundred. The people were divided into small principalities, with ΛE, or 256 souls under the head of a subordinate ruler, or prince. There were sixty-four of these governors of tribes, so that aside from a few priests and the higher rulers, there were in the valley ΛEE, or 16,384 souls.

As the supply of means of sustenance in

such a confined country, which was only about seventy-five miles long, by fifty wide at its fullest breadth, must necessarily be limited, and as the natural increase of population would soon create a famine, a strange and rather terrible state of affairs prevailed in the estimation of the visitor who might drop casually among the Dumachas. They had often noticed that aged men were scarce, and the custom explained it. In no case was the population to exceed the sixty-four tribes, each with their allotted number of souls. Each tribe kept its record, and the head government kept a record of each tribe, and the older ones were killed off as the young grew up. At sixteen years of age, a person became a citizen, or worthy of being numbered, and a brand giving his or her date of birth was burned with a gold brand upon the left shoulder. Then the most aged person in the tribe was worked out of the way to make room.

Young married couples were only allowed to rear two children, and if more were born

to them, they were put out of the way with due pomp and ceremony. If a child died of disease, another might be raised to take its place. On the whole, it was a system calculated to work sure destruction to a crop of grandparents, and in fact they were scarce in Nahaeco.

The country was governed by a monarch, who was selected in turn from one of the tribes, as the term of the other expired, which was only with death, but here the rulers of the kingdom were in no wise better off than their subjects, for when their time came they too must succumb to the law of the land, and be put out of the way to make room for the new comers. Each prince of a tribe had a voice in the councils, and passed by vote upon questions of state, previously hearing the wishes of his tribe in meeting assembled. Each tribe shared the products of its individual work in common, and the tribes traded together, the money accruing from sales being equally divided among the people of that tribe in proportion to the amount they had

originally produced. Gold was the medium of value, and was issued by the general government, for the people.

There was a tax for the support of the royal house, which was levied per capita upon the tribes, and settled among themselves, the invariable rule being to levy the assessment upon the amount of gold each individual possessed. In order that no one might be tempted to make a false report of his riches, the proof that he had made a false return of his store of gold was followed by a forfeiture of the amount not reported, to the general government. There were few tax dodgers, it was said, in Nahaeco.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE ROYAL PALACE.

It was April in the City of Sharrai, the chief place in the land of Nahaeco. The weather was balmy and beautiful, and the life led by the newcomers to the land was an indolent one. They had so applied themselves to their study of the language under Umrro and his associates, that they were enabled to carry on a conversation with some ease with their preceptors. They had not known a care since their advent in the strange land, except such as might come with thoughts as to their future, at each reference to which Umrro was reticent, and would take means to change the subject. They had been allowed to travel about the city under the espionage of their guide, and had found much to interest them, and more to excite wonder.

The country they found was walled in with overhanging cliffs, which were unsurpassable

barriers to the world outside. Far to the west, where the sun sank, was a sea of quicksands, which stretched almost as far as the eye could reach, and was as impassible as if it was a sea of fire. As far as they could learn, there was no avenue of escape. They were as completely shut off from the outer world as if they had passed out of it, and were confined in the last resting place. Damon took it philosophically, and Julian, for some reason, was not worried over the state of affairs. The others fretted not a little, and often talked over schemes for reaching the outer world again.

The friends were reclining in the court of their abode enjoying the balmy afternoon, and Damon was having a political argument with Umrro, trying to prove to him that the national banking system of Nahaeco was below par, when a messenger drew near and spoke a few words to the priest. A perplexed look came into his expressive face, and he nodded his head, at the same time dismissing the youth, who withdrew at once to carry back an answer.

"The hour has come, oh my pupils," began he in the musical language of the strange race, "when a member of the royal house summons you hither. Namona, daughter of Chécides, the king, calls to you, that you lend her your presence. Speak, my pupils. Shall it be so?"

"We are ready," answered Damon, in the same manner. "Is it not so, my friends?"

"It shall be even as the princess wills," assented Ritchie.

Umrro arose, and pressed the hand of each solemnly, and with a visage so long as to breed a little uneasiness in the breasts of his listeners. Bidding them follow him, he arranged his robe more carefully than was his wont, and led the way out of the abode, and into the street. From there he piloted them to a portion of the city which was new to them, and before a massive structure, arranged in a main building higher by far than its fellows, with two wings, which were somewhat lower. It was a magnificent structure, built of huge hewn stone, relieved with polished blocks of

various varieties of granite, and round pillars of what looked like lava.

Through a high arched entrance he led the way into the left wing, and through an elaborate corridor, in which the carving was wonderful, to a draped waiting room. Here Umrro whispered to a couple of female attendants who quickly disappeared, returning soon with the information that the party was expected. With the attendants leading the way they passed into a court of immense size, the wonderful elegance of which fairly took away their breath. There was the usual fountain, but far more elaborate than that in their own humble quarters. The basin assumed the size of a miniature lake, upon the surface of which sailed a number of sacred swans, to whom someone concealed behind a mass of flowered foliage was tossing some food, which they sailed up to and devoured majestically. There were flowers everywhere, and low couches, covered inches thick with furry skins.

The party passed close to the walls on the side, and as they neared the further margin

of the basin a picture presented itself which burned itself upon their memory. A woman had been seated upon a canopied couch, surrounded by several female attendants, and arose as they approached. There for the first time, they saw that brilliant dark beauty, which was celebrated over the land of Naheco, so grand in its womanly majesty that the men from civilization could only look and wonder. Umrro plucked Damon by the sleeve, and made a stern motion, which they understood was a command for them to kneel. They did so for a moment and at a sign from their guide arose and stood before the couch upon which Nanona had again seated herself, but at some distance away. Umrro did not kneel, a point of honor accorded the priests.

She was a picture impossible to describe. Her dress was in the main like that of the women of her people, but more elaborate. The flowing robe was of a deep creamy hue, and as glossy as the finest silk, in spite of the fact that it appeared more heavily woven than the modern product of the silk worm.

The garment was arranged with its edges crossed low on the breast, showing a perfect neck down to where the swell of the bust begun. From this point to the waist it was fastened by golden balls, thrust through gilt loops, and surrounded with gilt embroidery. The sleeves were flowing and ample enough to have reached to the wrist had they been allowed to do so, but instead they were laced to a point midway between the shoulder and elbow, from whence they dropped in wavy folds about the waist line. The brilliant though simple garment was confined to the form at the waist with a gold girdle, worn somewhat in the form of a corsage, and shaped like a Spanish belt. From beneath this hung the skirt portion in graceful folds to a point between the knee and the foot in front, while behind it swept the ground in a short train. The border of the front of this skirt was heavily embroidered with different colored gems, of the quality peculiar to the Rockies, not especially valuable in trade in civilization, but making the most beautiful

trimming imaginable. The weight of the gems drew the garment close to the form, and disclosed outlines which would have rivaled the statues of the Greeks. The feet were encased in dainty sandals with a low heel, and cross-laced with gem-embroidered bands, reaching nearly to the hem of the skirt.

A wealth of raven hair was caught up a little forward from the back of the queenly head, held in place by a sparkling band, and then fell in a rich profusion over the left shoulder, until it mingled with the embroidery of the skirt. Her face one would fail to describe. It had the perfection of feature of the large type of the Romans, with eyes and lips glowing with all the expression and fire of the women of the tribes of Israel. In society, she would have driven men mad and women wild with envy. In the palace of Sharrai she shone like a lovely gem, blinding the eye, and showing what was possible in beautiful femininity.

Nanona tossed the last scrap of food from her hand to the swans, and gazed intently

upon the men before her. Their strange manner of dress interested her not a little, and the peculiar whiteness of their faces made her wonder. Her look wandered from Damon to Ritchie, then to Julian, and a puzzled expression came over the beautiful countenance. Then she looked at Sexton for a moment, and the sturdy old miner blushed. Then back again to Damon, who was devouring her with all his eyes, and there her glance rested for a moment, and their eyes met. Then a troubled expression came over her face, and she colored slightly.

“Nanona, the daughter of the people, has sent for the strange men who come from above the cave of protection, that she may see with her own eyes, that of which her serving women have so often conversed with her,” she said, in a full musical voice. “Let the strangers speak to Nanona, and tell her if we are to be friends—the daughter of the people, and the strange visitors, who come from the great unknown. Thou of the pale face and golden hair, and thou of the gray

locks, who are as rugged as the cliffs, and thou of the soft eye that looketh like a woman (Julian blushed and trembled), and thou, oh princely one, who hath the face of mine own people."

The four friends looked at each other as if each expected the other to speak. Finally Damon, upon whom her eyes were riveted, roused himself from his stupor, and answered her in the musical language of her own people.

"Pardon us, oh princess, who are awed by the beauty of thy presence. The boon that we could crave is that we may claim as our friend the princess of the people, Nanona, the daughter of Checides. Smile not at our poor attempts to use the language of her people, which we have but poorly mastered in spite of the attempts of our friend Umrro to instruct us."

"He doth traduce himself, oh Nanona," said the priest with a smile, "for thou wilt perceive that they use our speech fluently."

"Ill would it become me to smile at the stranger," continued Nanona, "for what

saith the law of the Dumachas? 'Thou shalt treat the dependent kindly, and smile not at their woes.' Tell me your names, oh strangers, that I may know in what manner to address you apart. Fain would I learn who and what are our visitors, and whence they come."

They told her their names, each in turn, and she reflected a moment.

"Some of them I fear I will fail to master," she said, "and must needs name you to suit myself. 'Damon' and 'Harlo,' accord with mine own tongue. I perceive that you possess more names than one, therefore I will call thee Damon, and thee Harlo. The rugged one with the grizzled locks I would name again. He shall be Rusta, meaning the rock, and the frail one shall be henceforth Truila, meaning the man-maid. Now, oh strangers, and friends of Nanona, tell the princess of the people whence ye came, and how ye have penetrated to the land of the Dumachas. Seat yourselves, I pray, and stand not upon ceremony with Nanona."

Thus adjured Damon constituted himself spokesman, and gave the beautiful listener a brief running account of their adventures from the time of the discovery of the message upon the flask. The princess was an interested listener, no less than the women of her retinue, who remained seated about her. During the recital her expressive countenance was a study, and showed the deep feeling of which she was capable. At the most interesting points her face would grow animated, and her bosom heave with emotion, and when the tale of the agony in the prison cavern was reached, moist tears gathered in her eyes, and it seemed as if Damon alone was the object of her pity.

The conversation lasted well on toward evening for she plied her visitors with questions as to the world outside, and it seemed as if she would never tire of the recital of the wonders which were all so new to her. When the audience was at an end, she gave each her hand in parting and assured them of her undying friendship. Then she led Damon a

little aside, and looking into his eyes earnestly, said: "Tell not the others the tales you have told me. It is for your interest, in the days to come. The laws of my people are not the laws of the land you have left and ill would have befallen you ere now, but that the priests believed that Gosah had thrown about you the sign of protection. Trust all you see here about us, for they are true, but believe not in the friendship of others."

She turned as if to go, and then halting, said in a low voice, intended for his ear alone; "Come to me when the others know it not. I would have speech with thee again." Saying which she gave a sign to her waiting women, and they departed into the inner rooms.

After that day Damon was often missed by his friends, and it was at such times that he was in the company of the princess, where they fed the swans together in the basin, and exchanged ever growing confidences, Damon telling her more of that great outer world, which she had never seen, and Nanona telling

him in turn many of the queer beliefs, habits and customs of her people. Love is the same the world over, and though Damon would hardly have dared to speak to the princess of such a theme as the divine passion, their eyes told to each other the tale their hearts dared not admit. Once Nanona and Damon drifted into the subject of the social relations of the sexes in Nahaeco. It appeared that whenever two young people saw each other upon the streets of a city, or in the public places, if they thought by mutual glances that they would be suited to each other, the young man was allowed to go to her parents, and apply for an acquaintance with her and her family. If his prospects were acceptable to the parents, he was at once led into the court, and presented to her, and an acquaintance began. This was deemed a proper plan for enlarging the circles of acquaintance, so that each young man or woman would have a larger field to choose a life partner from, than a certain prescribed set, immediately about them. It also brought the making of these new acquaint-

ances directly beneath the eye of the parents.

There was no false modesty in Nahaeco. The woman was perfectly at liberty to confess her love at any time, as well as the man, though in this respect and in the affairs of the household, her province ceased. The subject was a dangerous one for two fiery hearts, already well on toward the gulf of mutual confessions, and did more to draw them together than months of ordinary intercourse. The waiting women of the princess were present on all the occasions, yet seemed to pay little attention, as if the will of the princess on the matter were paramount.

Damon's companions noticed the change in him, and were not far from guessing the reason.

"Such going on is pretty good for a woman-hater," said Ritchie to him one day, while they were enjoying a loll in the court.

"Ah! but how do you know that Nanona is a woman?" was the apt reply of the infatuated man.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW OF SUSPICION.

As time wore on, the strangers in the land were often visited by many of the higher men of the tribes, who were not a little curious to gaze upon the strange beings whose fame had gone abroad in the land. The major portion of these were satisfied with a look, while others would hold short conversations with them, but never unless Umrro was present. He seemed to have been constituted their guardian, and the visitors were allowed only such latitude as he willed. Often they brought with them the female members of their families, and in some cases, where these were more than usually beautiful, Ritchie would cultivate their acquaintance, and regale them with interesting tales of himself and friends, not always, sad to relate, strictly in conformity with exact truth.

Damon was too much preoccupied with thoughts of his own love affair to notice them much, although the majority of the women of the country were more than passably good looking. They lived and grew up in the school of nature, knowing not the confinements and injuries of modern society, and were the better for it. During all these calls, it was noticed that Julian, although of an age when youth is apt to be impressionable, held aloof, and would have little to do with the handsome maidens, although many of them cast inviting glances at his fresh, boyish beauty. Instead, boy-like, he preferred to look jealously and uneasily at Ritchie, as if he feared that some of the women of the land would succeed in winning the affections of his favorite. Gradually a coldness sprung up between Ritchie and himself, which pained the older man as he noticed it, and he watched a certain growing uneasiness on Julian's part with some misgivings.

Julian grew more morbid and inclined to solitude, and finally his friends took to watch-

ing him quietly. They feared that something was wearing upon his mind that might drive him to some extreme. One beautiful evening, after nightfall, when the moon flooded Na-haeco with its cold, chaste light, Damon was so filled with thoughts of his last meeting with Nanona, that he drew apart from the rest who were holding a lengthy argument in one of the rooms, and finally wandered unseen into the court, where the moon shed a silver sheen of brightness through the mists of the fountain, and sent little sparkles into his face from the surface of the rippling waters of the basin. He seated himself in the shadow and was soon lost in reverie, until he was startled by seeing a long shadow thrown across the court, in front of him.

Rousing himself, he looked in the direction from whence it came, and saw Julian steal along the edge of the shadow cast by the other side of the court, and move rapidly toward the exit to the building. Remembering the fears held for the young man, he started to his feet, and followed him at a safe

distance, taking care at the same time not to be seen. The youth sped stealthily along the deserted street, and toward the palace, the way to which Damon now knew so well. Arrived at the entrance to the left wing, he paused a moment to look back. His pursuer had hidden himself in the shadow of a column, and was not perceived, so Julian passed rapidly in. Damon followed him, and was just in time to see the young man disappear in the shadows at the side of the court where the princess lodged.

A pang shot through Damon's heart. What meant this nightly visit to the door of his beloved? The boy had gone there directly, and with all the assurance of a rendezvous. Could it be that he and Nenona had a secret understanding, and that he was but a fool, to be gulled by a woman? Was this glorious creature but a counterpart of the deceitful women of the world whom he had so long ago learned to hate? These thoughts roused the demon of jealousy within his breast, and a feeling of hatred came over him for the

youth who had been his friend. No basilisk is more alert than a jealous man. This one drew nearer to be within sight of the doorway, from within which came the soft chords of some musical instrument, accompanied by the words to a song—her voice.

“Be still, my heart, that doth so wildly beat.

“Why throbbs’t thou, with a feeling vague and new?

“That fillest with an essence softly sweet,

“Nanona’s soul. Ah! love, ’tis love, ’tis love for you!

“As falls the dew on Nature’s night,

“As Sarde floods the eve with light,

“As Gosah spreads his brilliant beams

“Afar, o’er mountain, fields and streams,

“So did’st thyself, mine own soul meet,

“’Til from that contact, passion grew.

“False one!” cried Damon, beside himself,

“So might she have sung to me, had her eyes read true.”

“I know not if thy heart has answer made,

“And yet Nanona readeth in thine eye,

“That at her feet, affection thou hast laid,

“As deep as love, as boundless as the sky.

"Where art thou now, my heart's own king ?

"Ah! will my song an echo bring,

"Unto thy heart, that lieth bare,

"For me to read, and nestle there.

"'Tis only to herself, the maid

"Doth loose her heart, and heed its cry.

The song ceased, and there was a movement within. Then a presence came between the light that streamed from within, out into the shadow, and approached the entrance. How well he knew that form. It was she, Nanona, the princess of the land, the queen of his heart. He could not hear the words, but he saw the greeting between the two, and ground his teeth in rage. He would not harm the boy. Even in that bitter moment he could not blame him. It was she who was at fault, and he who was the dupe. There was an embrace, something which appeared like terms of endearment, a few soft words, and then what seemed like a stifled sob from the boy. Then she kissed him, and Damon bit his lip until the blood came and ran slowly down upon his under lip. He had never

dared, and she had never caressed him thus, and he had thought she loved him. Women were women the world over.

Then the pair passed into the inner room, and the curtain was drawn about the entrance. Damon flung himself down upon the cold stones, and gave himself up to despair, then he began to feel that he must rouse himself in some way. He crawled to the edge of the basin, and bending over, bathed his hot temples in the cooling liquid. A white swan that had been sleeping near, heard the splash of the water, and lifting its long neck from beneath its wing, sailed farther away, after an inquisitive glance at the strange intruder. How long he remained there he knew not, but long enough to satisfy himself that the interview was a prolonged one, and probably of the most loving kind. Could she be guilty? He hardly dared ask himself the question.

Soon again he heard that voice, and in his rage he sprang erect, and stood with folded arms where the moonlight shone full upon him. She should see that he knew all, should

she come out with her paramour. Slowly the curtain was thrust aside, and with arms twined about each other two female forms came through the doorway and toward him. One was Nanona, but the other he knew not. Where could Julian be? The question did not trouble him long, for his whole thought was concentrated upon the approaching form of the woman he loved, the woman who was false to that great love. Slowly she drew near, and then she lifted that queenly head, and her eyes met his. For a moment she looked perplexed, and then she seemed to realize all. She drew herself to her full height, and looked at him, but without a quiver of guilt upon the beautiful features, which had frozen as she saw him standing there with the frown upon his face, his arms folded like a statue of justice. Even then a faint glow of pride came to her face as she took in his commanding presence.

“Damon has timed his visit ill,” she said, coldly, “or hath Sarde (the moon), with her brilliant face so transformed the night that

he has perceived in it the day. Speak, that Nanona may know if the riddle hath been rightly read."

"Speak me no subterfuges, oh, Nanona, princess of the Dumachas," replied Damon in a stern voice, while the woman who had accompanied Nanona drew a few steps away into the shadow. "Thine own acts may solve to thee the riddle."

"Mine acts are mine own," said the princess slowly. "Who dares question the actions of the princess of the people? Is it Damon who was my friend? A trespasser in the land of the Dumachas, who has stolen like a thief of the night into my apartments, and does thus dare to read the law to Nanona?"

"The princess of the people was not so circumspect when Truila was the offender," cried Damon, throwing prudence to the winds. "Is it thus that Nanona, princess of the royal house, receives her lovers?"

"By what right does the subject of Nanona question?" asked the now angry woman.

"Does he not know that at this place, and at this time, his life is at her bidding?"

"He knows not, and heeds not," cried Damon. "He only knows that he has loved a coquette, and cares not for life. She may complete the injury she has already caused him."

Nanona flushed at the words, and for a moment a thrill went through her as she heard the confession, but an angry woman who has been the victim of an injustice is not to be easily appeased. Taking a step toward him she extended her arm in a queenly manner, and spoke.

"Know, Damon, that it needs but the lightest word to have thee seized and punished for thy bravado, but as ye have erred through ignorance, and claim to love Nanona, princess of the people, she will take the fittest punishment that can be meted to a noble man who says he loves, and will prove she has been wronged by him who has professed that love."

Damon stood like a statue of unbelief, while she turned to the other figure, and said:

“Come forth into the light, oh my sister, thou whom I have named Losaia, the masked one, and have taken to my heart. Come forth, to confound this rash man, who has lost forever the love of Nanona, she for whom suitors come from afar over the land of the Dumachas. Not that I desire to boast of such poor beauty as I possess, but that I do wish to show to him the prize that he has forfeited. For now that he has lost it, Nanona, she who is a princess of the royal house, confesses to you both, what she had long ago confessed to herself, that she had given her heart to the stranger, he with the face of her own people, and whom she thought more worthy than the princes of the Dumachas. Come forth, oh Losaia.”

With that she turned her glorious eyes now filled with scorn, full upon her lover, and there stepped into the light one robed in a gown of exquisite richness, with the form of a lovely woman, but with the features of that Julian, whom he thought his rival.

“Oh, ye dullards. Ye thoughtless ones,”

cried Nanona, with grim humor. "Ye who have travelled with my sister whom I have taken to my heart, for many visits of Sarde (months), with her close by your side, and have never guessed her true sex. Ye have but one excuse, and that is that ye are men, and therefore dull. What ye had never suspected, Nanona divined from the first. Come with thy new sister, oh, Losaia. Thou shalt abide with me this night. Come, while we leave this suspicious, this unjust man to the punishment of his own thoughts."

Damon had sunk from the judge to the most abject penitent during the recital, and now stood with bowed head, the picture of contrition. He would have spoken but she waved her hand for silence.

"Speak not," she cried, "or Nanona, who has been thy friend, will only remember that she is a princess, and can punish an offender."

"His punishment lies more in the loss of Nanona than in a threatened death," said he, brokenly.

"See how he suffers," whispered the one the princess had named Losaia, softly. "Give him some sign of forgiveness."

"Not so," was the stern reply. "He is dead to me forever. One who truly loves, should disbelieve even his own eyes, against the woman his heart holds as its queen."

With this they left him standing there alone, and without a backward glance, Nanna passed through the door, and the heavy curtain shut her from his sight.

He stood there for some moments like one in a dream, and then slowly turned and passed out into the street, toward his own apartment, cursing in his heart the hour he had dared to doubt the noble woman who had confessed too late her love for him.

Meantime, the princess, alone with her new found friend, broke down completely, and found relief as her weaker sisters of modern civilization have ever done, in a flood of tears, while the other sought to comfort her as best she could.

It is probable that the bond between these

two was their great love for an undeserving man. Nanona had suspected the boy of being unsexed, and after Ritchie had begun paying a little attention to other women, the other had sought out the princess, and confided all to her. How she had first met and loved Ritchie, and had come to the men with the story of her being a brother of Loie de Jan-tezao, in order that she herself might accompany them on their search for the Devil's gold. The story of so much devotion had won the heart of the princess at once, and she had resolved to take her to her heart and under her immediate protection, before Ritchie had become entangled with some native beauty. After that she had learned to love her for herself, when she had seen Loie in her proper apparel.

CHAPTER XIII.

TCHINCUILAA, PRINCE OF THE DUMACHAS.

After that evening, Nanona refused to see any of the three men, and though she often went so far as to enquire of Umrro how it fared with them, she steadfastly refused to heed the messages Damon was constantly sending her, asking for an audience. As Loie, or Losaia, as the princess insisted upon calling her, was constantly by her side, she also remained invisible to them, except upon one occasion, when the royal party was passed in the streets, and then Nanona kept her head another way, though her companion allowed a blushing glance to follow Ritchie, who gazed upon her with some interest, and more reproach. He remembered all the little confidences that had passed from him to her, and was aware that she knew that he had thought of her almost as a lover dreams of

his mistress. He remembered the kisses in the cave, and knew that her love was even greater than his own. The thought made him less lonely in that walled-in and forgotten land.

Damon was poor company, brooding as he was over the fate that had befallen him, and his grief seemed so heartfelt, that his friends refrained from joking him about his affection for the princess. Ritchie was not a little pre-occupied, so the two older men, Sexton and Umrro, were usually left to carry on the conversation together, lengthening their arguments for hours at a time. The priest had been much interested in the pistols carried by his new friends, and noted with much surprise the attention they paid them at times. It had been agreed that the use of the fire-arms should be kept a secret, until such time as they should become useful in defending their lives, if matters ever came to that pass, so the kindly priest was told a story to the effect that they were a talisman from the deity of the strangers, all of which he ac-

cepted in good faith. He had wished to handle them, but was refused, on pain of dire disaster.

So matters stood, when one day Umrro came to them with a long face, and bade them prepare for an event which he had dreaded for some time past,

“In the beginning,” said he solemnly, “know that Umrro is the friend of his pupils, and would fain do his utmost for their welfare. You will remember the time when myself and the other priests were surprised in the cave of protection, by the strange entrance of the visitants from above, which were yourselves, my pupils. At every change of Sarde, it is the custom of the priests of Dumacha, to repair to the cavern, and offer up sacrifices to appease Saghah, the prince of evil, and thus protect the land from his wicked influences. You will also remember that it was the priest Ilhama, and his fellows, Hasuma and Vetzuma, who were about to take the lives of my pupils, when Gosah sent down his ray of fire, in token of protection. This ray fell upon

the heads of Harlo and Losaia, she who is now the friend of the Princess Nanona, so that they were hereafter sacred from the wiles of my brothers. With Damon and Rusta, here, it is different. An audience was held with Checides, he who is king of the Dumachas, and his princes, and it was agreed that the priests should take council for a certain time, while they studied the will of Gosah in the heavens, and even I, Umrro, a priest of the people, was given for your instructor, for the ever just Checides willed that nothing should be done until ye could speak for yourselves. And while I taught you, my pupils, I, even Umrro, learned to love you, and so now that the time has come when the great council shall assemble in the grand room of the palace, Umrro will lead you thither, and will lend his poor assistance in your behalf, though I much fear that trouble is in store."

"I care not, so far as I may speak for myself, oh Umrro," said Damon, moodily, "for whatever fate befall me is of little consequence."

"I must confess," said Sexton, emphatically, "that I have a considerable care what befalls me, or either of my friends, and it shall go hard with your fellow priests should they attempt any harm to either of us," and the sturdy miner capped his pistol, significantly.

"I doubt not, friend Rusta," said the priest, shaking his head dubiously, "that yon talisman is a very strong one, and I hope it may be able to confound those who may wish you ill."

After a few admonitions from Umrro to the effect that they should especially beware of Ilhama, who was the main spirit in the movement against them, the party set out for the palace, Umrro walking in the lead. On the streets they noticed a more than usually large number of people, so much so as to give to the city of Sharrai a holiday aspect, and it was noticed that the little party came in for a large share of interest at their hands, their appearance calling up quite an amount of discussion, some of the opinions being adverse, while others argued vehemently in their favor.

The main, or throne, room of the palace was an enormous affair capable of accommodating a large gathering. It was built directly beneath the high dome, which covered over what would be the court in the residences of the city. Light was admitted from huge openings built in filagree directly at the base of the dome itself. No provision was made for seats, aside from a few about the throne, the gathering remaining standing. All about this hall, which was circular in form, were a double row of massive polished pillars, which supported the dome. Behind these, at the points of the compass, were four square waiting rooms, which were provided with couches covered with furs. The floor was of polished granite, laid in huge irregular blocks, and covered at the front of the dais upon which the throne stood with a quantity of the spotted skins of the mountain lion.

It was the throne itself upon which the whole wealth of artistic genius has been expended. It was in the form of a huge couch, with a back fully twenty feet in height. The

affair had apparently been constructed from every quality of stone and petrified wood the land afforded, polished in places, in others carved in an elaborate manner. There were beautiful specimens of cameo, goldstone, tiger-eye, sardonyx, crocidolites, ribbon, jewel, moss and green agate, and satin spar. In the carvings, beautifully encrusted, were the mountain diamond, ruby, emerald, and every other gem, which sparkled in the mass, as brilliantly as the precious stones of which they are the pattern.

Reclining upon the skins of dressed grizzly and mountain lion, was Checides, the ruler of the people, a strongly built, handsome featured man, with a stern aspect. He was not old. No one was old in that land. His age might have been above forty-five, and he was a handsome specimen of manhood. At his side was seated his daughter Nanona, eclipsing all with her peerless loveliness. At her feet was the beautiful Chilian, looking regal in her splendid robe. Standing at each side were several of the ministers, or confidants

of the king, and at the base of the dais, on its first step, a dozen of the armed men of the household, six on a side.

The princes of the land were standing about the walls, together with the principal noblemen of their tribes, and in the center the three priests, Ilhama, with a wicked look upon his face, in close consultation with his two colleagues.

As the strangers entered, led by Umrro, a hush fell upon the assembly, and they were the centre of attraction, for many of the chiefs and princes from distant tribes had never yet looked upon the strange men who had set all the land to talking. As they passed up the room, toward the throne, Ilhama gave Umrro a fierce look of hatred, which was replied to with a steady gaze of determination by the friendly priest. Nanona paled a little at first, then assumed a haughty air, and appeared unconcerned, turning to one of the lords at her side to speak with him. The beautiful Chilian glanced tenderly at Ritchie, who returned the look so intently as to bring

an answering blush, while Damon bit his lip, and looked sullen. Sexton bristled with fight from crown to heel, and fondled his huge navy. At a point about twenty feet from the first step to the throne, Umrro stopped, the others following his example. Here the priest bowed low before Checides, who inclined his head in welcome.

"Greeting, oh Checides, just ruler of the Dumachas," said the priest, in a solemn voice. "Thou see'st how well Umrro hath kept his charge. He promised that should the strangers be delivered to his keeping he would deliver them into thy hand at thy bidding. Behold, they are here, they who I am proud to call my friends, and whom I have taught to speak for themselves; Rusta, the rugged one, and Harlo, he of the graceful form, and even Damon, he of the face of our own people, all are here, even to Truila, who had deceived us all, and who, now called Losaia, sits by the side of Nanona, the princess, and thy daughter. So now, ye see," he continued, turning to the three

priests, and the crowd of listening noblemen, and drawing himself to his full height, "how well Umrro keeps his promises."

"'Tis well, oh Umrro," said the king. "May Gosah deal with thee, as thou dealest with thy king and his people. Now, oh, ye priests of the Dumachas, what would ye of our visitors?"

"Hail, oh King, Checides, called the Just," cried Ilhama, striding to the foot of the throne, and turning so as to partially face his sovereign, and also the concourse of princes and lords. "Ye, even ye, hath set a time when the intruders shall receive the will of the priests of the Dumachas. The time has come. I, even Ilhama, have consulted with Gosah and his hosts in the heavens, and together with the priests of the people, have we seen by signs the will of the Most High made manifest. Ye all have heard how the earth tottered in the dome of the cavern of protection, and how the four fell headlong even upon the altar of sacrifice, together with the mountain of gold poured also upon the altar

itself. That sign spoke for itself, but even as we, the priests of the people were about to slay them, and give them to the flame, Gosah sent a beam of protecting fire, upon the heads of two, thereby marking his preference. Who can doubt the will of Gosah? Who, I say? Is it Umrro, that hath made himself the friend of the intruder, and thus merits the punishment of the people?

He ceased, and as he ran his questioning eye about the room, a murmur arose, and many eyes were turned upon the friendly priest, who stood unmoved, with scornful mien.

"What then, is the will of the priests of the Dumachas?" asked the king quietly.

"It is that the will of Gosah be fulfilled. Let the two men perish by the casque, and be given to the flames,"

There was a stir about the room at the words, and Nanona pressed the hand of Losaia and bent to hide the startled expression of her face. The brow of the king contracted, and Umrro started as if to speak,

when he was silenced by a look from Checides.

"Speak, oh strangers in the land of the Dumachas," said Checides in a loud voice, "and let the princes of my people hear your defence."

The friends looked at each other in a doubtful way. That trouble was in store was apparent, but the time had not yet come for action. Ritchie knew that he was to be spared, but that did not deter him from a determination to perish with his friends, in a gallant fight, if necessary.

"You state the case, Damon," said Sexton. "You are somewhat of a lawyer, and can make a good plea. Meantime keep your fingers upon your pistols, all, and prepare for action. We will show these fire-worshippers how Americans can fight, when it comes to a pinch. I fancy we will make this pretty place look like a slaughter house for several consecutive minutes."

"Greeting, oh Checides," cried Damon in ringing voice, stepping forward a few paces,

"and peace be with ye, oh princes of Nahaeco. We come not here of our own accord, but from that land without, of which ye know naught, have we been hurled within the land of the Dumachas, by the will of Gosah, whom under different names we all worship. We have no quarrel with the Dumachas, and would depart hence were it possible. We but ask to live at peace with all, and dwell yet a little while in this land. Mayhap Gosah, who has cast our lot among you, will open up a way for our departure. Peace to you, oh people."

There was another murmur among the princes as he finished. It was apparent that he had made a good impression, and that the strangers had friends among them. But Ilhama was not to be robbed of his prey so easily. He scowled grimly as the king turned to him.

"They speak fair," said Checides. "What hath Ilhama to say further in behalf of the will of the priests of Nahaeco?"

"It is the will of Gosah that they perish,"

cried the priest stubbornly. "Who dares dispute the will of the Most High?"

"A word, oh king," cried Umrro, who had remained quiet, noticing that Nanona was about to rise, and signing for her to be seated. "Ye have heard the statement of Ilhama, who contrary to the laws of Gosah, thirsts for blood. Is it not written, 'Ye shall not take the life of My children, except it be lawfully, according to the written law? Therefore, I say they shall not perish. Who is it that would make for the people of Nahaeco a new law? Is it Ilhama, the stern? Ilhama, the false reader of the heavens? The one who deals in dark secrets, and who is suspected by many of the people of being in league with Saghah?"

The countenance of the king brightened for a moment, and then he looked sternly at Ilhama.

"Well spoken, oh Umrro," he said. "Truly, Ilhama, they can not perish, according to the written law."

Nanona gave him an eloquent look of thankfulness, which he perceived, and knew

that his daughter was the friend of the strangers. A murmur went about the room again, and Ilhama bit his lip with anger. For a moment he spoke in secret with the other priests, and then one of the princes, he who was next in line of succession to the throne, Hatesta, a man of heavy frame and evil aspect, joined them and whispered a few words. Ilhama again drew near the foot of the throne, and raised his hand on high.

"Well hath Umrro spoken in the eyes of my king," said he. "Truly, well hath he spoken for his pupils. The law of the land shall not be violated. Therefore we, the priests of the Dumachas, will that they, the two who have not received the sign of Gosah, be branded with the highest brand, and become the next in order for the hand of death, according to the written law. Well have they named thee the Just, oh king. You will see that this is justice."

"Hearken, oh king and princes," cried Ritchie, stepping forward, and facing the assemblage. "I will have none of the protec-

tion of Gosah, that doth not include my friends. What? Are we not brothers, and are we not protected alike? Ye shall not touch them, or woe be unto you, for the strangers have a sting that ye shall feel, even to your death. I boast not, therefore tempt not the wrath of the people of the outer world."

"The speech of Ilhama is just," cried the king, rising. "Threaten not, oh white faced man. Checides would even do ye all a justice. He wills it not that ye die, but ye shall be received with the brand, even as one of the people of the land of Nahaeco."

At this point Ilhama and the priests hurried into an adjoining room, and returned with a brazier in which was burning a bed of coals from which blue flames were emitted. Then Nanona, who had been struggling with herself for some moments arose and strode to where Checides stood.

"Oh! my father," she cried, "If they harm them, they harm also your daughter, the princess of the people, for know that Nanona

has given her heart to Damon, he with the face of our people. If thou strikest him, thou strikest me also. Spare him."

Checides folded his daughter to his breast, and whispered to her. "Thou should'st told thy father this matter before," he said in a troubled voice, "for now his will has gone forth and can not be withdrawn."

Nanona cast a heartrending glance at Damon, whose heart leaped at the confession which he had overheard, and then sank upon the skins beside Losaia. Hatesta, the prince, drew his blade, and stood ready for the word from Ilhama, who was heating a small set of brands in the coals.

"Well," cried Sexton in his own tongue. "Is the time come for battle?"

"Not yet," cried Damon. "Let them take me first, and as the brand approaches the flesh, one of you fire from a point at the side, so as not to hit me. This branding will only give us a short time to live and we might as well fight it out now. They are going to give us the lowest number, so that it is our turn to

pass in our checks next. Besides, they brand us on the left shoulder, and I have a suspicion that mine will surprise them. It is something I have not yet told you of for fear you would laugh at me, but wait and see."

Ilhama approached, and Damon stood out at the foot of the throne, gazing with glowing eyes at Nanona, who was watching him with a look of terror.

"Let them take Damon first," he said in loud tones. "He fears not for the brand of the Dumachas."

Hatesta approached him and cut away from his shoulder the jacket and then the coarse woolen shirt. Giving them a pull with his hand, the rent opened, showing the shoulder, girded with muscle and sinew. The dark flesh was marred with a crimson stain. Umrro saw it, and bent closer. Then with a cry he raised himself aloft.

"Hold, oh king," he exclaimed. "A miracle, a miracle. Bring hither the great book, that contains the records of the brands of the royal house of Nahaeco."

Checides stepped down from his throne, and Nanona looked on in wonder which was no less than that of the Americans. The great book with coarse leaves of parchment was brought, and Umrro turned over the leaves rapidly.

"Behold, oh princes of the nation," he cried, excitedly, placing his finger upon a page, and waving the other hand aloft. "Here lieth the record. Behold, Gosah hath performed a miracle, for here standeth Tchincuilaa, prince of the Dumachas, next in line of the royal house. Tchincuilaa, child of the eagle. The young prince who was stolen from ye by the giant bird when yet a babe. Shout, oh ye princes and chiefs, a miracle! a miracle! The records can not lie."

Hatesta bent forward, and the princes drew closer to look upon the scar, and then upon the book.

"Tis Tchincuilaa! 'tis Tchincuilaa," they shouted. "A miracle, a miracle."

Hatesta drew apart, and a scowl of deep hatred over-spread his countenance. He was the next in line, and the new-comer would

usurp his place. With a sudden impulse he drew back his arm, and the keen blade flew from it with fearful force full at the back of Damon. Umrro saw the motion, and threw himself upon his loved friend, dragging him aside just in time, but the keen blade sped on, and pierced deep the breast of Checides, who was about to speak. He threw up his hands, and fell upon the steps of the throne, thence rolling to the granite floor, dead.

For an instant there was a hush upon the scene, while the assemblage looked in horror upon the act of the mad prince, there was a slowly rising murmur, and Ilhama drew close to the side of the murderer, drawing his blade also, while he pressed another into the hand of Hatesta. Nanona bent for a brief moment over the prostrate form of Checides, and closed the eyes, then with quick instinct she seized Damon by the arm, and led him with rapid strides to the throne.

"Quick, on thy life," cried Ilhama to Hatesta, "Assert thy claims, or thou art lost. Thy followers stand irresolute."

"All hail, oh princes and chiefs of the people," cried Nanona as she drew herself to her full height, and stretched a beautiful hand toward Damon. "All hail Tchincuilaa, king of the Dumachas. The king, my father is dead. Long live the king, Tchincuilaa. The king, Checides is dead. Avenge his murder, according to the written law."

There was a movement and a swelling shout among the assembled men, and then Hatesta strode to the centre of the hall, and swinging his blade above his head, he cried in a loud voice.

"All hail, ye princes of the people, ye who are my sworn friends and followers. All hail Hatesta, king of the Dumachas. Checides is dead, not slain by this hand, but by the will of Gosah, who sped the weapon to the breast of Checides. Seize ye the usurper, the stranger in our land."

From the movement which followed, it appeared that the followers of the wicked men were many, for from all quarters they pressed toward him, and crowded close.

"All who are subjects of the rightful king, assemble here by Tchincuilaa," cried Nanona. "Oh speak to them, Damon, now king of the people, that the faithful may assemble."

"Here, let the faithful gather," exclaimed he, to please her. "Here gather all who are abiders by the law, and subjects of the royal house."

The friends of the new king drew closely about him, and at once the assemblage split up and began to separate. At a command from Hatesta, a party of princes started for the throne on the run, with blades drawn. Sexton has been thirsting for fight, and with a grim look, he singled out the leader of the party, and leveling his never failing navy, he sent a bullet crashing through his skull. The man stumbled in his rush, and striking on his head upon the granite floor, lay all in a heap. For a moment the people were stunned by the sight and the report, and then Umrro, cried :

"See ye not how Gosah deals with the enemies of the royal house. Woe, woe to all

who oppose the reign of Tchincuilaa. Room—room here for the friends of the king.”

The circumstance brought many more princes to the floor about the throne, but fully half assembled about the traitor prince at the other end of the room. Then Hatesta, strode to their front, and shaking his blade full in the faces of his foes, yelled defiance.

“We depart, oh usurper, but will come again. I even I, Hatesta, rightful king, will assemble and prepare for bloody war against mine enemy. Keep thine eye open for the coming of Hatesta and his hosts.”

“And when ye come,” cried Damon defiantly, “watch for the eye of Tchincuilaa, and read in it that it seeks out the form of Hatesta. Read in it also, thy fate, for on that day thou diest, even by the hand of Tchincuilaa, king of the Dumachas.”

“And a mighty good kind of a king, too, come to think of it, for our purpose,” chuckled Sexton, giving his pistol a look of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN MARS AND VENUS.

In the day that followed, there was no lack of stir and excitement. The life that had been led by the adventurers up to that time, had been such a totally uneventful one, that they were prepared for anything, and were more than delighted with the preparations for war, in spite of the fact that it was liable to be serious in its consequences. Damon's friends of course required an explanation of the strange brand upon his shoulder, and he replied that he knew as little about it as they did. When the supposed Julian had recited his story about the discovery of the strange child in the mountains, he had only remembered as a coincidence the fact of what he supposed was his birth mark. He had been adopted by a wealthy family, which had removed in his infancy to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and they had never told him of his

parentage. They had died, the wife and husband in turn, and left to him a large fortune, which he had enjoyed in his taciturn way. He admitted his strange resemblance to the people they were thrown among and could not doubt Umrro's assertion, that the records could not lie. It must be therefore, that he was the prince, Tchincuilaa, now king of that land. At any rate he assumed the ermine with all the *sang froid* of one born to the throne, and issued his commands in a manner which bred respect, not to say awe, among his vassals.

Hatesta had withdrawn with all speed from the city of Sharrai, taking with him the three priests, and thirty of the princes. It was learned after they had departed, that there had been a plot on foot to dethrone Checides, with the guilty prince and Ilhama as the leaders. This left to rally to the arms of the new king 33 principalities, his own being in doubt, as it was the one ruled over by Hatesta himself, who was the prince who had succeeded to its rule, after the loss of the infant

Tchincuilaa. One of the first matters attended to after the rebels had fled from the palace, was the work of Umrro, who was ever on the alert. Knowing the value of having all the forces possible at command, he had dispatched a trusty messenger on one of the fleetest horses in the country, to the tribe governed by Hatesta, that they might be informed of the state of affairs, and that their true prince had come to them again.

Sexton was given the fortifications to look after, and Ritchie had in hand the arming and equipment of the forces. Damon, or Tchincuilaa, as he must be called in the future, under the advice of Umrro, busied himself with the mobilization of the army at his command. The faithful princes hurried at once to their cities, and were ordered to report with all speed with what men they had at command. Umrro had thrown aside his priestly robes, and appeared in warrior's garb, and right well did he appear, and like a brave man, as he was. Sexton took workmen, and constructed trenches about the town, where

it was exposed to the foe. In its rear there was no danger, for there and at both sides were the impassable cliffs. Then he caused the water from the cataract to be turned into the wide trenches, and a deep moat was the result. Inside of this again, a wall was built of granite blocks, ten feet in height. This was the bulk of the work.

Ritchie visited the forges of the armorers, and found there a great number of men, busy making the large blades used by the people. He found that the greenish metal in use, the nature of which he could not analyze, was peculiar to that country. It was as light as aluminum, and was more susceptible to heat than tin, so much so in fact, that it melted almost with the contact of flame. The knives were of no use in striking a blow, on account of the lack of weight, and had to be driven point forward by main force to have any effect.

It took him but a short time to improve upon this, and although he met with much opposition from the old armorers, he suc-

ceeded in persuading them to adopt his improvement. The metal was in itself capable of many times the resistance of steel. A small strip of it, as narrow, and much thinner than the blade to a pocket knife, was impossible to break, and would hold a point like a needle. He had them make sword blades, heavily weighted with copper, and then the edges were sharpened by welding in the metal, which was called sutaya. This was done by joining a cold strip of the metal with the heated blade, when it was easily welded. These swords were to be carried in addition to the ordinary knives.

The workmen were adepts, and labored rapidly, so that when they became accustomed to the new work, they turned out several hundred a day of the new and really dangerous weapon. He also had constructed a dozen huge pieces of ordnance, after the pattern of the ancients, worked by levers and huge springs of pliable wood. These would hurl a stone weighing fifty pounds with great force, and were calculated to work havoc

among a concentrated enemy. Thousands of the stones were carried to the top of the wall, to be precipitated by hand upon the enemy, should they attempt to scale it. They worked night and day, but the task was a long one, and it was not fully completed before the time for battle arrived.

Umrro had insisted that the three men assume the dress of the Dumachas, directly Tchincuilaa was king, a line of action they were not sorry to pursue, for their vestments were somewhat frail and worn from long use and repeated washing. When they appeared together for the first time in their new apparel, they were inclined to make sport of each other. They had no mirrors, and were forced to depend on the opinion of their comrades. While they laughed much at their personal appearance, that they were a noble looking trio could not be justly denied. The robe and sandals gave them a still more imposing presence, and they looked even more sinewy than in their civilized dress.

It was when they donned their armor, and

placed on their heads the helmets of sutāya, fretted with gold, a long blade of Ritchie's make by their side, that they looked truly noble, and like the crusaders of old. The helmet of Tchincuilaa was also encrusted with a multitude of mountain gems, and at its peak was the spread tail of an eagle, based by the head of the same animal, in which two eyes, made of rubies, shone like fire. Nanona had designed the decoration, selecting the feathers with her own hand. This she did for him, though she still held aloof, and would not grant him an audience, stating, when he would ask to see her, that if the king commanded, she would obey. He never pressed such claims, so as yet, there was a coldness between them. She had thought it proper that he bear the crest of the eagle, to remind his followers of the manner of his disappearance from them in his youth.

While all these preparations for war had been going on, there were other occurrences more or less exciting. On the day that Hatesta had departed with the rebel princes, it

appears that Ilhama, enraged at not being able to work evil in the royal house, had hidden himself in the temple of Gosah, until after the shades of night had fallen. There, in a room adjoining his own, he had kept for some time, a huge mountain lion, of the size of a mastiff dog. This animal he had captured when a cub, and had taught it to obey his slightest wish. With him the brute was gentle, from terror. Ilhama had trained it, on its first attempts to combat his authority, with a rod of copper, heated to a white heat, and ever thereafter it had feared him. Now he drew near to where the animal was chained to the wall, and spoke soothing words in its ear, at the same time feeding it bits of the raw flesh of the tame mountain goat. At every mouthful the wiry brute would snort and the fur would rise like bristles upon its back, while its spotted sides moved in ecstasy at the tasty morsel.

When all was quiet in Sharrai, Ilhama loosed the fierce brute, and taking him by the metal collar, led him softly toward the palace,

dodging stealthily from shadow to shadow, to escape observation. Thinking that Hatesta and the rest had gone, no sentries had been placed, so the way was clear. The evil priest crept silently through the entrance to the apartments of the princess, and drew aside the drapery cautiously. The occupants slept, with no thought of danger. Ilhama drew aside the curtain, and pushed the head of the beast inside. Nanona was lying in slumber on the further couch, her long hair sweeping the floor at its side, her classic bust rising and falling in regular respiration. The dim light from the lamp overhead was just sufficient to enhance her beauty. The lovely Chilian lay nearer the entrance, on another couch, as soundly sleeping.

An expression of diabolical hatred came over the features of the priest, he bent and placing his lips close to the ear of the lion, emitted a peculiar hissing sound. The fur of the animal arose on its hide like bristles, and its tail switched nervously. Then Ilhama

loosed him, drew the curtain, and fled through the shadows of the night.

The brute sniffed the air, but never took its eyes off the sleeping women. Its worst passions had been aroused, and the blood from the raw meat, still clinging to its nostrils, maddened it the more. With a snaky movement it slowly drew nearer to them creeping more lowly as it went. Losaia moved uneasily on her couch, and her arm, fair and round, fell from its edge. The movement wakened her, and her eyes opened. The beast, startled for a moment crouched lower, and its moving tail swept back and forth on the stone floor.

Losaia, daughter of a hunter as she was, realized her danger. She knew that to arise was to precipitate the brute's spring, so she was as quiet as possible. She had always kept the pistol she had carried, strapped to her side, and it now lay on the floor beneath the dangling hand. Stealthily she moved her fingers, until they felt the case, and her hand closed about the grip. As stealthily she

cocked it, but the click had roused the enemy. She knew by the sudden drawing back of the haunches that there was not a moment to spare, and she drew the weapon from its case, and raised it erect just as the spring came.

The beast flew straight at her and the report followed at the same instant, so closely that the muzzle of the brute was nearly in her face. She crouched, and the heavy body fell across her, blood spattering everywhere. There was a move. The heavy bullet had done its work. She lay beneath a dead carcass. The ball had torn a hole in the lion's breast, piercing the heart.

Nanona woke with a shriek, and attendants were on the scene at once. The brute was dragged away, and the frightened women crowded about Losaia, who still held the smoking pistol in her hand. Nanona realized it all in a moment, and flung herself upon the neck of her friend, bursting into thankful tears and kissing her fondly.

"Oh noble one," she cried. "Well hast thou proved thy love for thy sister. Hence

forth we shall never part, until the heart of Nanona is cold in death. Oh, brave one. It is Losaia who has frustrated the villiany of Ilhama."

"It was but a little thing," said Losaia, modestly. "He should never have harmed one whom Losaia loves."

When the news of the affair reached the men, they were affected differently. Tchincuilaa grew pale, at the thought of the danger that had beset the woman he loved, while Ritchie flushed with pleasure, at every word of praise heaped upon Losaia. The show of heroism on her part carried away his last doubt, and he knew that he loved the beautiful woman with a wealth of affection he had never felt for Bernice, or any woman in New York society. Umrro and Sexton were enraged at the priest, and the city was scoured to find him. He had made a successful escape however, and had a start of many hours.

The princess's lover sent a messenger telling her of his anxiety on her account, and

Ritchie begged an audience from Losaia, with the permission of Nanona.

"Shall Losaia grant him his wish?" asked the fair girl, timidly. "Oh shall she hold aloof, until Nanona frowns not upon the lord of her heart?"

"Speed not thy wooing by the ill aspect of mine own," answered Nanona, kissing her with fervor, though there was a tear in the dark eye as she did so. "Thy lover is a loyal man, and if he be sweet in thine eyes, speak him fair, even in the halls of Nanona, who is thy sister."

So it came about that Ritchie received an answer that he might attend at once if he so wished. As he was about to hurry to her side, Tchincuilaa stopped him for a moment.

"I say, old fellow," he said. "Speak a word for me to the princess. I know that I was a brute to doubt her, but I think that I have been punished enough to satisfy even a princess, and queen of the Dumachas in beauty."

"That I will, dear boy," was the answer, accompanied with a sympathizing pressure of

the hand. "I think she is treating you rather shabbily, but it will all come right in the end, and she is worth twice the trouble."

Ritchie burst into the apartments of the pretty pair, and received a smiling and cordial welcome from the princess, and a burning blush from Losaia.

"Welcome to my Lord Harlow, he who is arming the men of the royal house with swords of might," cried Nanona. "But there is another who welcomes thee yet more, and who would fain see thee alone. Therefore will I withdraw to the inner apartment."

And she did so immediately, in spite of the rather weak assurances from the pair that she was not in the least in the way. Ritchie advanced toward Losaia with a smile.

"Was it just, to treat your friend in such a manner?" he asked. "After we have been side by side for weeks, through trials that might wreck the stoutest hearts, was it kind to keep me from you?"

"I was afraid," she said, blushing deeply. "I will admit that my actions were unmaid-

only, and I feared that you would never forgive the deception. How could I tell that you would overlook so many falsehoods?"

"You should have known me better. Your bravery alone through all our adventures fully prepared me for such a grand and heroic act as that of last night. Had I no other cause, the beauty of your womanhood alone would amply plead for forgiveness. But then I have nothing to forgive."

"You have much to forgive," she said softly, blushing at the lovelight in his eyes.

He drew nearer, and sunk half on his knees at her side, taking one trembling, but unre-sisting hand.

"Do you not remember the confessions I made to Julian?" he said, bending closer to the beautiful face. "Many times as great is the love I bear to Losaia. Why should we stoop to subterfuge? Can I ever forget the kisses in the cavern? They cling to my lips yet in sweet memory, and tell me the tale I long to hear repeated from your lips in your own sweet voice. I love you, Loie." His

arm stole unresisted about her waist. "Tell me that your kisses did not lie, and that you love me."

The lids drooped over the dark eyes for a moment, and a happy blush mantled the olive cheek. She stole a quick glance up into his face, and then answered in a low voice.

"What need to tell, what you know already?" Then the impulsive woman flung her arms about his neck and her lips met his in a passionate kiss. "Ah! yes, I love you," she cried, "have loved you since the days in California, before we came upon this fearful journey. It was love for you that made me masquerade, and lie to you all, that I might not lose you. I love you, Harlow, and am proud of my love."

He would have answered her, but Nanona, thinking they had wasted time enough to cement the strongest bonds of love, entered at that moment. She was pleased at the happy termination of the meeting, and said so frankly. The pair received her blessing, and then Ritchie took the opportunity to plead

his friend's cause, in which he was aided by Losaia. The princess knit her fine brows and remained obdurate to all argument. Finally she broke into a little laugh and said :

“Ye plead well, oh ye lovers. Bear with me yet awhile. Ye think ye love, but ah ! it is a little thing beside the great love I bear my lord. Nanona wishes to punish Tchincuilaa's suspicion. What ! am I a child, that he should suspect me ? Bear with Nanona, and oh ! tell him,” with a sudden burst, “that all may yet be well.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE SIEGE OF SHARRAI.

Gradually the princes began to arrive at Sharrai, until at last there were no tribes missing, with the exception of that of Tchincuillaa, which did not appear, nor did the messenger return to them. Each prince brought his warriors, so that after a time the city began to have more the appearance of a camp than a peaceful town, which heretofore had known nothing of the clash of arms. Store enough had been brought to the city to keep the garrison for many months in case of a siege, and the day drew near when Hastesta was expected to arrive with his hosts. Umrro and the princes had at first combatted the idea of allowing themselves to be besieged, but the Americans demonstrated to their satisfaction how much easier it would be to battle in that way, and showed the number of the foe they could kill, to one of their own men.

Therefore the chiefs relinquished the idea of giving battle in the open field, and decided that the plan of the white people was the better one.

Each chief had at his command about a hundred fighting men, many of them being youths of not over sixteen years, but the Dumachas mature early, and these boys were fit antagonists for a man of any age. A prince who could only muster a hundred men may seem in our modern eyes to appear in a rather ridiculous light, but everything goes by comparison, and as the Dumachas had never known or heard of anything greater in the way of a prince, they felt as proud of their titles as a foreign-born alderman does of his first election. The forces of Tchincuilaa therefore numbered somewhat over 3,300 fighting men, the few men-at-arms of the royal house, which were of the tribe of the dead Checides, the one which had deserted to the enemy, being in addition to the thirty-three companies.

All the warriors were mounted and brought

with them inside of Sexton's wall their horses, which were of a breed much resembling the Arabian but in two distinct hues, white and black. The Dumachas never cross-bred the colors. They were fleet little animals, and much stronger than they looked. Small headed, large eyed, and clean limbed, with broad chests and silky manes they were beautiful animals and as intelligent as they were beautiful. Stables were provided for them and quantities of feed stored. They did not require much however, as, like the Arabian horses, they could subsist upon little.

One morning a sentinel came from the outposts placed at the moat, to inform Tchin-cuilaa that the enemy was approaching and would soon be opposite the city. Ritchie's work was almost completed, and he urged his laborers to renewed effort. A little knot of the foe, in which were seen the forms of Hatesta and Ilhama, galloped to the brow of a hill, and mounted upon their horses looked down upon the city. From the wild gestures

they indulged in, it was fair to presume that they had not been prepared for the preparations that awaited them. Accustomed to primitive styles of warfare, they gazed with surprise upon the solid wall which had raised itself as if by magic, to oppose their attack upon the city.

After a time they moved off and galloped in a direction parallel with the wall, seeking some vulnerable point. The outposts of Tchincuilaa were eager for battle, and crossing a light drawbridge, made a sortie, which drove the reconnoitering party back upon its approaching columns. After a time the whole force had gathered, while the officers of the army of Sharrai watched it from the top of the wall. Umrro scanned the companies narrowly and a perplexed look came to his face.

"I see not the forces of the men of the house of Tchincuilaa among them," he said. "Look ye, my lords. Count ye the forces as they are they are drawn up before us? See ye more than the thirty companies?"

They counted them over, and admitted that the priest was correct. There was still one company missing from the array. The force which had crossed the drawbridge returned to its post, jubilant over having driven the enemy to flight. Meantime Ritchie pushed his men to their best efforts, and in a few hours reported that he was ready for the attack. Half of each force was posted at intervals along the inside of the wall, with sentinels at its top, and ladders placed so that the others could mount it when necessary. The other half was kept as a relay, should the first become wearied with repulsing repeated attacks.

It was at this stage that Nanona sent for Tchincuilaa, and he hastened at once to her presence with a beating heart. In her own apartments she received him, looking proudly regal as she bade him welcome. She did not speak at first but advanced toward him, with a heavy sword, which had been beautifully chased, and its hilt set with gems.

"Tchincuilaa, king of the Dumachas, need-

eth a weapon strong and keen," she said, extending it toward him. "Therefore accept from the hand of Nanona, this blade, which she herself has ordered prepared for him. Oh, wield it with might, so that thou may'st first prevail over thy foes. And should'st thou meet with Hatesta, the guilty one, remember whom it was slew my father, and spare him not. Oh! may the sword, the gift of Nanona, find its sheath in the heart of the hated prince."

"Thrice welcome is the sword from the hand of Nanona," answered Tchincuilaa, accepting it, and hanging it at his side. "It is a sturdy blade, and well will it fight the battles of the new king. Ay, and when it is drawn, then will the image of Nanona rise before the eyes of him who loves her, and make his arm doubly strong. Welcome is it from the hand of Nanona, for that I know it brings with it the well wishes of the giver. Is it not so?"

Nanona essayed to speak, but her eyes fell. Then she looked up fearlessly, and met his gaze.

"Nanona will admit," she said, "that she has been shamefully used, but who can fathom the heart of a maid? Nay, do not presume too much by this confession," as he would have sprung toward her. "Thy suspicions Nanona will not lightly pardon, but this comfort will Nanona give. Come to her when the strife is over and the battle over. Come to me then, and receive thy pardon. Now away to the siege."

Tchincuilaa gave her a quick passionate glance. Her eyes met his in a look which was a benediction, and then he was gone to the battlements, to join Sexton and Ritchie, who were making hurried preparations for the attack which was likely to come at any moment.

The point at which the most hazardous defence was to be made, was at the gate which had been let into the wall. This had been constructed of huge hewn planks, swung upon heavy hinges. It was necessary to have some opening in order to provide means of egress from the city. Here were gathered

the best men of the party, among them Ritchie, who had planted two of his most formidable pieces of ordnance where they would command the entrance. Tchincuilaa held the left wing of the wall, while Sexton was stationed at the right. Some distance behind were the men in reserve, so that they could come at once to the assistance of any point which might be hard pressed by the enemy.

The moat had proved of some use at the start, for it had checked the advance of the foe, and given the beseiged an opportunity to complete the finishing work on the defences. The forces of Hatesta however, were not long in constructing a bridge to cross upon, yet it prevented them from making advances from a distance, as the bridge and moat were in plain sight. Hatesta's advance drove the men stationed outside within the walls, and the gates were closed and barred.

The only missiles used by either party up to this time were stones, hurled from slings, which they had learned to use with much

precision, and great force. At the first advance, there was a shower of stones between the two forces, and several men went down wounded, those retreating to the gates, carrying two of their comrades in with them. Then the work of Ritchie's invention began. It was somewhat of a task to load them, as the levers had to be drawn back by main force, but they worked admirably, and the heavy projectiles were hurled at the bridge, where the attacking forces were crossing the moat. Many of them did little damage, owing to the distance, but often a shout would go up from the besieged when a more than usually telling shot would send the dirt flying in front of the approaching horses, or strike a horse and rider, throwing them both to the ground, often never to rise again. One well directed shot ploughed along the bridge, and threw a half dozen bleeding and bruised into the moat below. Had there been curses in the Nahaecian tongue, they must certainly have followed.

After a time, the whole force was over, and

the forms of Hatesta and Ilhama could be seen galloping about the lines giving instructions. The firing of the missiles had ceased, for it was best to reserve the ammunition for closer action. Some of the companies in front occupied themselves in putting together long and strong platforms, something after the pattern of the ones used as gang planks by river steamers, and others hurried off toward a grove of trees of immense size, which grew about a mile away from the moat. The platforms finished (three in number), they were seized by large numbers of the men and carried forward on the run toward the wall, at three different points. A large force followed each as they advanced, hurling stones with their slings. The fire was returned from the wall, and a cloud of stones began to fall on either side. The aim was true in many instances, and they could be heard rattling on helmet and breastplate, or on the metal shields of the soldiers, which were carried so as to protect the head.

The intention of the attacking force was apparent in a short time. As they neared the wall, the platform was placed on end by a united effort, and then allowed to drop forward upon the edge of the wall, dozens of men mounting it at once to hold it down, and rush over it to the top of the barricade. The first attempts were unsuccessful, for as soon as it fell, willing hands seized it and flung it from the top, whence it fell with a crash, hurling its occupants upon the ground in confusion. All this time the men from the top of the wall kept up a constant fire of stones from their slings, or when the foe came close enough hurled down the larger rocks upon their heads. In spite of the somewhat primitive form of warfare, there were a large number killed, and more wounded, so that they were not able to continue the struggle.

Once or twice the attackers succeeded in mounting to the top of the wall, but they were met by the warriors on the other side with such fierceness that they could not succeed in holding their position for more than

a few moments. The long swords were of wonderful benefit in repelling an attack, and the besieging force was placed at a great disadvantage. After several trials, in which Hatesta lost quite a number of men, there was a lull in the attack, and the officers held a consultation by the side of the moat.

"The foe pauses for reflection," said Umrro, wiping the perspiration from his brow, and giving his dripping blade a glance. "Hatesta has felt the sting of the fangs of Tchincuilaa. What thinks my Lord Harlo?"

"Wait," replied he, sententiously. "See you not that band of men returning from the grove?"

"Truly," mused the priest. "What mean they now?"

By the united effort of a whole company, the gigantic trunk of a tree was being carried with some rapidity, to the scene of action. Ritchie watched them for a moment anxiously, and then gave some orders in a rapid tone to a messenger, who hurried away. It was apparent to him now, that the foe in-

tended to use the heavy tree trunk as a battering ram, for the purpose of forcing the great gates. The messenger he had sent to Tchincuilaa and Sexton, with a command that if they saw his center hard pressed, they were to come at once to his assistance with reinforcements. Ritchie urged his men to the siege guns, as he called his pets of ordnance, and had them loaded and ready for action. The body of men with the battering ram drew near, and there also came across the bridge to the moat a new party of warriors mounted on black steeds. As they neared the rest of Hatesta's forces they sent up a cheer. The new-comers seemed to know where they would be most effective for without dismounting the foremost to cross waited for the rest until they were all drawn up in line.

Meanwhile the party with the battering ram had approached the gate, and the stones were hurled at them with some precision. If one man fell, however, it did not seem to make any difference, and the heavy weight

was carried with a rush straight at the gate. Ritchie gathered his forces for the shock, and placed men at the ground upon the inside to meet the attackers should they succeed in breaking in the gate. The stones rattled down upon the heads of those nearest the wall as the huge ram was hurled against the gate. Ritchie signed for the mounted reserve inside the wall, and the new force on the outside mounted on black horses broke into a gallop and came tearing toward the gate.

There was a fearful crash as the ram met the tough planks, and they might have withstood the blow had the walls been built stronger. As it was, the stanchions were broken from their moorings and the heavy gate trembled for an instant and then fell inward, carrying some of the besiegers with it in its fall. The huge tree trunk dropped in the opening, and the men who had not been felled in their tracks by the stones of the men stationed on the wall, drew their blades, and with cries of "Hatesta ! Hatesta !" prepared to

hurl themselves upon those inside, believing that their mounted friends were coming close behind to their support. With a shout a large force of Hatesta's men who had been engaged in storming the barriers mounted their horses and urged them toward the opening. A concerted plan of attack was made. Tchincuilaa was busied with a party of stormers at the left wing and Sexton, held in the same way, was not able to send any assistance, as they had all they could do to repulse the nimble men who threw their platforms upon the walls, and attempted to mount them.

Ritchie was soon on the ground facing the now ruined gate; his brave soldiers at his back, prepared to battle to the death. The first force of mounted men came on with a rush but silently until they were fairly at the opening, when with a cheer the shout went up from their throats, "Tchincuilaa, Tchincuilaa, The Eagle flies to the rescue. Tchincuilaa." They rode completely over those who had battered in the gates, and then turning,

charged back at the advancing horsemen. It was a glorious charge, taken as it was against twice the number, and so unexpected was it that the others turned at once and sought safety in flight back to the main line of their friends. As they turned Ritchie noticed the messenger Umrro had sent to the doubtful province and knew that he had been successful. Each warrior in the gallant company wore at the crest of his helmet a single eagle's feather, in token of allegiance to the rightful king, their prince.

The band soon returned within the battlements and was welcomed by Nanona, who had ridden from the palace to the scene of the conflict. She could not bear the suspense and insisted upon being upon the scene. Tchincuilaa descended from the wall to beg her to return, but she and Losaia insisted that they preferred to remain. Nanona thanked the messenger and then moved slowly off to the brow of the inner hill, whence she could watch the progress of the battle beyond the reach of flying missiles.

The three friends held a short council of war with Umrro and it was agreed that it would be the better plan to make an attack on their own part. The enemy was much discouraged, and if it could be completely routed the siege might be ended without having to wait weeks and perhaps longer for its termination. They admitted that the loss of life might be greater but the end would justify the means. They therefore mounted and about 2,000 strong galloped to the outside of the wall through the gate and were ranged in fighting line before the other forces were aware of their intent. They were just in time for Hatesta had not been idle and had prepared his whole force to make an attack upon the dismantled gate, and force an entrance.

There was not a moment to be lost and the word of command followed their exit so rapidly that those who were at the wings of the force had but just time to wheel their horses and tear toward the foe in line with the others. Now the Eagle men, with Tchin-

cuilaa, held the centre directly opposed to Hatesta, and Ritchie and Sexton commanded the left and right wings. The remainder of the force held the gate, and were to protect the entrance of the attacking force in case of a repulse.

CHAPTER XVI

THE END OF THE TRAITOR PRINCE.

Tchincuilaa turned for a moment in the saddle to look upon Nanona ere he charged with his men, and saw her wave her hand at him, as if to wish him success. He swung his long blade aloft in answering greeting, and then, with a shout which was repeated along the line of his little army, the whole force charged at a tearing gallop toward the foe. Hatesta had hardly an opportunity to gather his men, many of whom had been dismounted to receive the charge, so he was obliged to receive the shock without having the impetus of movement to check it. The charging column came on bowed out in the centre, the wings being a little behind in the start. So irresistible was the charge of the Eagle men that the opposing centre of the enemy which was directly in front of the bridge hardly seemed

to offer a resistance worthy of mention, and was driven before Tchincuilaa's horsemen, like straw before the wind.

Many of the rebel army were forced into the moat, in some cases followed by the pursuers who were unable to check their steeds. A large number, among which were Hatesta and Ilhama, turned and dashed over the slight bridge with Tchincuilaa and a few followers in hot pursuit. Others who would have followed were prevented from doing so by the falling of the slight structure, which had been loosened from the banks. Meantime, the wings of the attacking force had much the best of the battle. The enemy had been taken completely by surprise and the superior arms of the men of Tchincuilaa put them at a disadvantage. The long swords gleamed as they swept from the front of the galloping column, each as if directed by some malignant ability finding its sheath in the breast of a foe. It was but a short time before the forces opposed to Sexton and Ritchie, stricken with terror, dis-

mounted in hot haste, and throwing themselves into the moat made for the opposite bank with all possible speed. Arrived at the other side, the majority of them threw down their arms and signified their intention to capitulate. The horses they had left behind were herded, and driven inside of the wall, where they were cared for by the reserve force, which had never been brought into the action.

Meantime, Tchincuilaa and but six of his men, finding that they were not supported by the advance of the balance of the company, and realizing that they were not numerous enough to cope with the score of the foe who had crossed the bridge before them, reigned in their panting steeds, and galloped back toward the moat. Hatesta had noticed at the same time that the number in pursuit was a small one, and calling out a command to his companions wheeled to look for the cause of the sudden change of action on the part of the pursuers. He at once perceived that the bridge was down, and that the small party was making speed back to the moat.

"Back; upon them!" he yelled. "The bridge has fallen, and Tchincuilaa is at the mercy of Hatesta and his loyal ones. On! and we sweep him from the face of the earth, and the day is won. Tchincuilaa dead, who will dispute the sway of Hatesta?"

With a wild yell, the party urged the horses to their utmost speed, and flew in hot pursuit. Tchincuilaa glanced back and saw that unless the bridge was put in place his little party must meet alone the approaching force of over three times its number. Ritchie and Sexton had perceived his plight and were doing their best with the men at hand to again place the bridge in position. As Tchincuilaa neared the moat they shouted to him in encouragement redoubling their efforts. From the hill, Nanona saw the desperate condition of her lover and turned pale with fear, yet the brave woman never took her eyes from the two parties; the one so large and the other apparently so insignificant. Tchincuilaa beheld her for an instant in the distance, and a fierce flame shot through him. She

was looking upon him, and she should see him die fighting manfully.

The now pursuing force was upon them, and they felt that they would not have time to fling themselves from their horses and take to the moat before the foe would be upon them. With a quick movement they swung their steeds about, and charged back again diagonally. This forced Hatesta and his men to alter their course and follow in an ever changing tangent, which lost them much speed, and also scattered somewhat. Seeing this Tchincuilaa gave the command to his few staunch followers and in a compact body, they charged directly at the foe, striking them at a point where they met only about their own number. Three of the men had provided themselves with the long swords but the balance were only armed with the knives or broad blades of the Dumachas. Four of the foe went down at the first shock, but the three other Eagle men were not so fortunate and could not follow the others after they had finished their men and were

off at a gallop. The short blades had prolonged the battle and before they could join their comrades others of the force were upon them.

Tchincuilaa saw their plight and resolved that he would not leave the brave men in their peril so, with a command to his comrades, he charged back, directly at the struggling knot of foot and horsemen. The fight was already a fierce one. One of the soldiers of Hatesta had fallen from his horse dead and another was binding up a knife wound. One of the Eagle men, wounded to the death, had seized an adversary about the waist as he closed with him and as they fell to the ground plunged his keen blade to his heart with his last gasp. The four men charged directly into the struggling mass and the long heavy blades hewed and stabbed, drawing blood at every lunge or sweep. Soon the little party was in the center of a fierce mass of foemen, whom they received upon the points of their swords or hewed to the ground through casque and skull. It was a

fearful fight. Both men and horses were bleeding from countless scratches but still they fought on until but two of their number with their king remained alive in the struggle. The ground was strewn with the bodies of the foe, while the riderless horses galloped about over the plain.

The horse of one of the men fell, pierced in the neck with a knife thrust, but as its master touched the ground he was on his feet, battling until trodden under the hoofs of the steeds of the enemy. Then the opposing faction drew away, but only six in number, Hastesta and Ilhama among them. A shout from the distance told that the bridge was completed, and gathering together, the force of the traitor prince tore down upon the two men, hoping to sweep them down with the force of the charge. Up to this time Tchin-cuilaa had forgotten his pistol, which he had carried from the first. It held five loads, and a smile of satisfaction illumined his face as he drew it from its sheath. He waited until the charging men were close upon him and then

opened fire with such effect that before the shock came three of the saddles were empty. Striking his horse a blow, it dashed to one side just in time to avoid the rush of Hatesta and Ilhama, who had singled him out, and they went by him in a flash. His companion braced himself and his keen blade passed clear through the throat of the charging soldier, the shock throwing dead and living to the ground where they rolled, the blood of the vanquished pouring over the victor in a red stream.

As Ilhama, the wicked priest, dashed by, Tchincuilaa swung aloft the blade given him by Nanona, and with all the nervous energy of his powerful frame sent it crashing down. The keen edge caught the priest above the ear and such was the force of the blow that it cut diagonally through jaw and neck. The head dropped forward upon the chest and as the horse dashed on, its half beheaded rider plunged over its shoulder. The foot of Ilhama became entangled in the saddle and the frightened horse tore toward the moat,

passing the rescuing party, which was hurrying to the assistance of its king, rushing over the bridge, and dashing up the hill inside the wall, where the murderer was flung loose directly at the feet of the Princess Nanona and her companion, Losaia.

Back on the field, two score of horsemen, with Sexton and Ritchie approached where the two remaining actors in the tragedy were drawn apart. Hatesta threw a glance of hatred at the king, and with a loud shout bore down upon him. Tchincuilaa urged his horse to its utmost speed and the two met directly before the eyes of the reinforcements. The duel was short. Hatesta flung his blade with all his force at his enemy, and so true was the aim, that if the horse of Tchincuilaa had not reared, it must have pierced the neck of the king. As it was, it struck the upper edge of the breast plate and rattled to the ground. Tchincuilaa raised himself in his saddle, and giving his arms a mighty swing, the blade of Nanona whistled through the air. It met the neck of Hatesta, the head sprung into space, a spout

of blood gushed from the still erect trunk, and then the limbs relaxed from about the galloping horse, and the body fell with a crash to the bloody plain, a hundred feet from the head, which lay upon the trampled grass, its wicked eyes still staring its last glance of hatred and malice, terrible in death.

Prolonged cheers rent the air as the traitor fell, and Tchincuilaa was surrounded by a crowd of his followers, who seemed to be in an ecstasy of delight. Sexton and Ritchie galloped up and grasped a hand on either side.

"We had about given you up," remarked the former, "but you seem to be a hero of the first water, and have downed the lot of them. Gods! but that last was a blow. I couldn't have done it better myself," and he glanced with an approving glance at his bare and sinewy arm.

"I think I have seen as strong blows delivered by you this very day, at the wall," answered Tchincuilaa.

"It seemed as if the time we were getting that bridge in position was interminable"

said Ritchie. "We all thought to see you swept from the face of the earth when you made that rash charge. Where are the balance of your men? All dead?"

"No, that reminds me. I have a duty to perform, for I think one brave fellow still lives."

Looking about searchingly, Tchincuilaa beheld the warrior, covered with blood, ranged in rank with the rest of the men, and taking things as nonchalantly as do all truly brave men upon occasions of the kind. Tchincuilaa called to him in his own language.

"Where is he who stood by the side of his king to the last, and faced death for his sake. Oh! tell me, where is the brave Eagle man who battled as one against the many? Let him step forth to receive the hand of his king."

The man came forward a little sheepishly, for the eyes of the whole party were upon him, and another party was approaching with Nana and Losaia riding in the lead. He mumbled something about doing his duty as all brave men should, but Tchincuilaa was

not content with this. He took the hand of the brave soldier within his own.

"What may the king call his brave defender?" he asked.

"Latusa," he replied, "sometimes called The Mighty, armorer to the forces of my king's house."

"Step forth, oh Latusa, the armorer, and receive the public thanks of thy king, and rank hereafter as a chief of the tribe of Tchincuilaa. Thou shalt serve by the side of thy king, at the royal palace."

Then as a cheer went up from the surrounding warriors, he said with a laugh to his friends, "What's the use of being a king if you can't dispense a little happiness and justice about you?"

As the newly created chief turned with a flushed and gratified face to join the troops, Nanona, who approached, passed close to him and untwining a costly jeweled chain from about her throat, she drew it deftly about his helmet, and cried, "So doth Nanona, she who is a princess of the land, crown

bravery and worth among the people of Nahaeco."

The companies drew back in silence as the two beautiful women approached the men who had officered the forces of the day. Nanona's eyes shone brightly, and a flush of excitement overspread the deep-hued cheek as she approached her lover.

"Hail to the victor," she cried. "The armies of the traitor prince are subdued, and bow to the rule of Tchincuilaa, the rightful ruler in Nahaeco. There lives no one to dispute his right, for with his own hand hath he slain Ilhama, the wicked priest, and Hatesta, the murderer of Checides, and disturber of the peace. Well hath the prophecy of Umrro been fulfilled here, and Tchincuilaa hath conquered and slain with the sword given to him by Nanona, the wicked prince. Thus hath the king avenged the death of Checides, my father. Thus is Nanona avenged, and thus doth she thank her lord and hero, he who hath slain single handed the hosts that would have trodden him to the

earth, where I myself beheld him." The queenly woman, lovely with a passion-kissed loveliness, rode up to her lover's side and taking both his hands flushed rosy red, then leaning from her palfrey, bent her head toward him as quickly as the motion of a bird, and kissed him full upon the mouth. He trembled at the contact of the warm lips, and in the excitement of the moment forgot the newly learned tongue, and whispered that one word, which means so much to all English-speaking people, when they love, "Darling," at the same time flashing into her eyes a glance which answered hers.

She had said that if he came to her with victory in his hand she would forgive him, but womanlike, she had been better than her word; in the moment of greatest peril when victory and honor hung in the balance with defeat and death, she had come to him on the wings of love to die with him or crown his victory with heart laurels surpassing in lustre the diadem of the Cæsars. There was love for him in the future—and such love as promised paradise in the one word—home.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEATH BY THE CASQUE.

Peace followed the siege of Sharrai but the new ruler found himself confronted by an unpleasant duty. Vetsuma, the third priest in the plot, had been taken in battle, and according to the written law must pay the penalty of his wickedness by death. The people demanded it, and although Tchincuilaa was for pardoning him unconditionally, Nanona, with whom he was on the most loving terms, advised him not to vex the people by attempting to depart so far from their traditions as to pardon him. Her lover was sensible of the good advice, but resolved to attempt to save him, by making an appeal to the council assembled.

Accordingly the chiefs were called to the great hall some days after the battle, when quiet had been restored, and the ill-fated priest was brought in. Tchincuilaa was

seated upon the throne, a position which became him well, wearing the rich dress of his kingly dignity. By his side was Nanona, regal in her beauty, which was enhanced by the lovelight in her clear eyes. Close by were Sexton and Ritchie, while Losaia held a position at the feet of her dear friend. The culprit was allowed to stand unmanacled a short distance from the foot of the throne, where he looked up with defiance at his king. He seemed to feel that there was no hope for him, and he would meet death bravely.

About the hall were the princes and chiefs, with stern faces, awaiting the pronouncing of the sentence of doom by Umrro, who was now the high priest of the people. In their glances there appeared no hope for the man. Tchincuilaa glanced at him pityingly, hoping that he might be able to save him, for what harm could one poor man do now that the struggle was over, and the insurrection forever stilled.

"Ye bring me here," cried the doomed man, looking about the hall with a glance of

hatred," that ye may gloat over the victim and watch him writhe with fear of his doom. Ye shall all see how a priest of the Dumachas meets his fate. Know that Vetsuma hates ye all, ye and the usurper."

"Peace," said Tchincuilaa, in a concentrated voice. "Know you not that your king would save thee?"

A sneer was on the lips of the priest as he turned his wicked gaze upon the king, and then his eyes flashed with a sudden resolve. He gathered his body like a panther that is about to spring upon his prey, and seizing a blade from the side of a chief who was standing by he flew up the steps toward Tchincuilaa. The men directly about him were unarmed, and Nanona uttered a shriek as he saw death approach her dear one, flinging herself in front of him to protect him with her own body.

The evil intent had very tame ending, for the priest, filled with the frenzy of murder, passed close by Ritchie as he mounted the steps, and that young fellow gathered him-

self as he had often done with the gloves at college, and delivered a nervous short arm blow directly upon the jaw of the mad priest. There was a dull sound as the iron knuckles met the face, and then the priest went down like a shot, the knife rattling from his grasp, and sliding along the granite floor, at the feet of the horrified princes, who had made a concerted rush to defend their king, who was already endeared to them by his bravery. The body never moved while they waited for him to rise. The blow had stunned him.

"That was one of your old favorites, Harl," laughed Tchincuilaa, apparantly little moved by the occurrence. "I fancy you have been pining for just such an opportunity."

"It did feel quite natural," replied Ritchie, while he nursed his hand, "but the fellow has a deuced hard head."

Probably nothing that Ritchie could have done would have so filled the assembled people with wonder, as that same blow. They were strangers to the manly art, even in its most primitive stages, and to

see one man fell another as if he had been struck with a rock filled them with awe, and the fame of his fistic powers went abroad over the land, and was set down as his most immense claim to greatness. Of course he was then thanked by the people for saving the life of the king, and had rhapsodies of gratitude showered upon him by Nanona, all of which wearied him somewhat, but the few whispered words and the bright glance from Losaia lingered long in his heart and made him long for another victim.

Vetsuma was unconscious for several minutes, and dizzy for many more. His rash act had made it impossible for the king to intercede for him even if he had been so inclined, so when he was sufficiently recovered, the priest was again brought before the throne, securely bound, where Umrro took great satisfaction in pronouncing sentence, and consigning him to death by the casque without honors. This was the only style of death meted out in the land, but when people were to die because of their be-

ing of a ripe age, or by the laws of the country there was considerable pomp in connection with the rite.

In the case of Vetsuma the ceremony was as simple as possible. The day set for the execution there was an immense gathering of people at the banks of the quicksand lake, where there was a small temple erected, also a projecting abutment thrown out built of solid masonry. A broad path or road led straight up to it from the plain, and about, where they could see the execution, were the people by thousands. The priest was led out upon the plain without being allowed the rites of the temple, and he was placed bareheaded before the multitude.

Attendants brought a large copper affair, shaped much like a helmet, as in fact it was the helmet of death, or the casque. This casque completely covered the head to the neck when placed in position, and was hinged at the back. The peculiar part of its construction, was that at its top was a projecting knob of sutaya. This was held suspended above the

casque by a spring, and at its other end it was sharpened to a needle point. This point, when the casque was adjusted, was suspended directly over the soft part of the center of the skull, above the brain. Amid a deep silence this casque was adjusted to the head of Vetsuma, and it was noticed that not a quiver passed over him. The people of that country learned to expect the casque at some time and it had few terrors.

The arms of the priest were pinioned and the limbs bound with strips of fiber. The living body was then laid upon a plank, and carried to a slide, which projected from the masonry over the quicksands. At the feet was fastened a large conical piece of copper, the feet being bound firmly to the flat portion and allowed to project over slightly, while the head of the doomed man was toward the vast audience. Umrro stood by with folded arms, while a large man armed with a mallet of gold stepped to the other side. Not a word had been spoken. All had passed off like clockwork. The executioner with

the mallet took his position, then Umrro spoke :

“Vetsuma, once priest of the Dumachas,” he cried solemnly, “divested of thy office, prepare to meet thy fate. ‘Take thou not, nor seek to take unless it be to thine own preservation, the life of thy fellow,’ saith the written law. Oh thou dark angel of death, waft the culprit to the embrace of Saghah, the evil one. Gosah forgive us.”

With that he made a scarcely perceptible sign, and as the people murmured a hoarse amen in the Nahaecian tongue, the mallet of the executioner was raised and fell, then the body slipped from the slide with the meeting of the weapon with the casque. A deep-toned gong sounded from the inner court of the temple, and a flame shot high into the air, as the heavy body disappeared from sight, and fell without a sound into the hungry quicksands, never more to be seen by mortal eyes. And that was the end of the insurrection altogether, and the last of the plotters.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DOUBLE WEDDING.—THE PROPHECY.

The days that followed were chiefly remarkable for their extreme quietude. Several months passed uneventfully, and Sexton was becoming decidedly restive. As for the balance of the party, they were too much taken up with each other to seem to miss the days that slipped by until the heat of the summer was past and the seasons were ready to slide into that dreamy autumn which precedes the winter months. The old miner, while he had the utmost patience for one of his years with the younger people, began to fret under the desertion which resulted from the close companionship of the lovers, and as he had nothing better to think of pined for the outer world and studied deep laid schemes for the purpose of escaping from the prison country.

Umrro and he became quite friendly, in fact had it not been for the loyal priest he would have been subject to a much deeper ennui. Their old arguments were carried on to an unlimited extent, but the breach came when the priest openly sided with the young people, asserting that they had a perfect right to bask in each other's society to their heart's content, Sexton to the contrary notwithstanding. After that for several days, Sexton kept to his own society, and grew more dissatisfied than ever. Umrro understood him quite well, for he was an astute gentleman, and realized that it was jealousy which was eating at the heart of his friend.

Meantime the lovers had quietly arranged matters, and it was agreed that they should be wedded in a few weeks. Umrro was consulted, and he advised that they should set the date for the feast of Gosah, which occurred according to the Nahaecian religious calendar when the sun was at a point in the heavens corresponding to the equinox. Tchincuilaa and Ritchie had been undecided

what to do as to a ceremony, as the form in vogue was hardly a marriage such as would satisfy a modern mamma, and Losaia especially, having been raised a Catholic, was not certain as to whether it would be right and proper. They finally decided that, as they were in the United States, and everywhere a marriage by contract was recognized, they would ingraft so much of an innovation into the ceremonies of the country.

Accordingly when the time came, Sexton was coaxed into being a party to the scheme, and agreed to assist. On the day before the regular ceremony, Ritchie drew up two contracts, in which the subscribers agreed to live together as husband and wife until death did them part, and they were properly signed and witnessed. The two friends signed each other's contract as witnesses, Sexton making the other party to each. As Nanona was not up in English chirography, she made her sign in the peculiar characters of her race, and Sexton wrote her name in Spencerian penmanship beneath it. The next morning the

marriage ceremony was held, and an impressive one it was.

The news of the wedding had been carried by couriers to every part of the land, and Sharrai held the major portion of the population of the country on that day—the 22d of September by the Christian calendar. Not one of the subjects came without bringing with them a present of some kind for the young people, and these gifts comprised everything of value in the land, from a mountain kid to a toilet ornament. There were fine gold and silver utensils, gem embroidered stuffs for robes, finely wrought chains and bracelets, silver and gold girt sandals, and everything conceivable, that might go to adorn or be useful for the person or household of those who had grown to be the pets of the nation.

The ceremony occurred in the temple and was pronounced the most elaborate that had ever occurred in Nahaeco. Headed by a cortege of priests, at whose front marched Umrro, resplendent in jeweled robes, came

the royal party. The two brides first, carried in palanquins by maidens in robes of golden yellow, next Tchincuilaa in the royal litter, by his side Ritchie and Sexton, all carried by the men of the household. Behind walked the princes and their spouses, all clad in gorgeous gowns. At each side of the route were drawn up the people of the country, voicing loud acclamations as the long cortege passed by. Arrived at the temple, the party passed into the lofty hall, where the fumes of perfumed wood filled the place with a sweet odor. Here the priests procured huge torches, and after lighting them led the way through an immense doorway into a great vaulted auditorium.

The torches only sufficed to partially light up the interior, but in the center could be seen a sculptured altar, upon which a blue flame burned, from which was emitted a faint, subtle odor. Before this altar the wedding party was stopped, while the people followed in, until it seemed as if there could hardly be one person in the land left outside. The

priests stood near the royal group, holding the torches aloft. The princes were ranged in a half circle a short distance away, and through the dim distance of the huge vaulted room, the people made their way.

Suddenly, coming softly at first, and then growing louder, came sweet strains of music, and then the people took up a slow but rather catchy chant, which gave a weird effect to the whole affair. The priests formed in a circle and marched slowly around the two couples, pausing to cast a fine powder upon the flame on the altar, which flared up in a golden glare as the powder touched the fire, the people continuing the chant:

Grace us with Thy presence, mighty
Gosah—ruler of the thousands—
Throned above, clad in the raiment
Of Thine own refulgent glory.

Hither come Thy suppliant children,
Held to earth by living fetters.
Held unto each other holy,
Hallowed by their deep affection.

Come they to Gosah, the mighty—
To His temple for the bridal,
Asking for Thy blessing holy,
Holy incense do they offer.

Vouchsafe them Thy sweet permission,
To take each unto the other,
Man to wife, and wife to husband,
Until life shall pass the river.

Speed Thou life unto the lovers,
That they life may bring in union.
Smile upon their love so holy,
That they seek to pass in wedlock.

Gosah, Great, the time approaches.
Dart Thy flood of fire upon them,
Fierce as passion in their bosoms,
Warm, and tender as a mother.

The chant ceased, and the music died away
in a faint murmur of exquisite melody. At
the same instant the lights were extinguished,
and for a moment it seemed as if the room
was in total darkness, but soon a faint light
was seen coming from overhead. Umrro

stood by the altar, and extending one arm toward the waiting lovers, he said in a solemn voice:

“Tchincuilaa, and thou, oh Harlo, clasp thou the hand of Nanona, and Losaia, that together, hand in hand, as ye may be heart to heart, ye may greet the will of the Most High, should he vouchsafe to beam upon ye with his life-giving fire. Flesh of man, in the likeness of strength and beauty,” he continued, as the four stood with their hands tightly clasped, “so stand ye before the great Maker of all things, to accept of the conjugal gift at his hands.”

His voice ceased, and then there was silence, as the faint light above gradually grew brighter, until the four stood out in relief from the rest of the assemblage, and the blue flame on the altar was dimmed. Then suddenly, as if by magic, one broad sunbeam from above blazed down upon them, lighting the four lovers in its celestial rays, and gilding the splendid robes, and the living hair upon the four handsome heads.

"Gosah weddeth thee," said Umrro solemnly, "and Umrro, high priest of Sharrai, through the will of the Most High, gives you each to the other. Nanona, wife to Tchincuila, and Losaia, wife to Harlo. Blessings and peace be with you and with thy children, evermore."

Then the party passed out again silently into the sunlight, the newly wedded pairs looking rather foolish, but supremely happy. Shortly after there was an open-air feast, in which all the people joined, and there was a gala time, followed by such games as the inhabitants of the country indulged in, consisting of athletic sports and tests of strength. In the latter the Americans deigned to join with the people, and astonished them by their wonderful cleverness. Ritchie especially had not forgotten his college training, and not only excelled in their own games, but initiated them into the intricacies of the hitch-and-kick, high jump and pole vault, to say nothing of his throwing. In the latter respect he caused loud acclamations of wonder from the pre-

cision and force with which he hurled stones, doing nearly as well with his strong arm as they could by the aid of their slings.

They soon tired of the exertion, and repaired to the inner court, where the friends with the two brides, together with Sexton, were served with a private repast, while the sounds of the merry revelry was heard outside. The day was a pleasant one, and the swans sailed lazily about in the basin, a slight breeze fanning their cheeks from the falling spray of the fountain. Later on dark clouds began to gather in the east, but they did not notice them. Life was too sweet just then to cause any thought of the weather. The two women wandered around the edge of the water, and tossed food to the swans, leaving the men to themselves for a moment.

"You do not seem to appreciate the happiness of the present occasion," said Ritchie, addressing his uncle. "What seems to trouble you? Has anything gone wrong?"

"My dear nephew," answered Sexton, a trifle testily, "it is hardly proper for an old

bachelor like me to venture any remarks upon an occasion of this kind. Of course you two have your fair wives now to claim your attention, and what interests me can hardly be of any amount of interest to you."

"I fear that you are just a trifle jealous, Sexton," cried Tchincuilaa. "Don't despair. You will succeed in getting some of the maidens entangled yet."

Sexton made a wry face, indicative of the utmost contempt. "Deliver me," he said, "I want none of it."

"What is it troubling you then?" asked Ritchie.

"Well, if you must know, I want to get out of this infernal country. How does that strike my newly made benedicts?"

"With all my heart," cried Ritchie, "but how?"

Any answer that might have come was interrupted by a peculiar rumbling noise all about them, followed by a shifty trembling of the earth beneath their feet. At the same time the bright sun overhead was overcast

by dark clouds, and a flash of lightning, the first they had seen in that country, illuminated the sudden gloom. The trembling was repeated, and a commotion, together with loud cries, was heard without. Nanona and Losaia drew close to their husbands, and through the doorway of the court came Umrro, his face looking wild, followed by several of the princes.

“The prophecy! the prophecy!” he cried. “When the earthquake comes again to the land, then shall the people cease to be, and the race be gathered to its fathers, under the smile of Gosah. Prepare to die, for the prophecy is about to be fulfilled. The earthquake is here.”

The Americans drew their wives to their breasts to pacify them, and loud and long came the cry of the panic-stricken people from without the court, “The earthquake! The earthquake! Woe, woe to Nahaeco. Woe to the Dumachas.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLYING SHIP.

Beyond a well developed scare, the earthquake did not amount to much, and the prophecy turned out much as prophecies always do. After a few days the inhabitants had forgotten all about it, and went about their daily life as if nothing were likely to happen which need cause them anxiety. With the four young people, life passed away like one long dream, and they were apparently without care for the future. Sexton grew more dissatisfied every day, and finally when several months had elapsed, he managed to get the ear of his nephew long enough to fill that young man with the desire to escape from the prison country.

The longer he thought of the matter, the more he became impressed with the idea, which grew upon him from day to day, until he was as anxious as his uncle to again mingle

in civilization and taste the pleasures of the society it afforded. Nahaeco was all right in its way, but after all there was a sameness about the quiet life there, which was in a measure exasperating. Uncle and nephew were a little uncertain how Tchincuilaa might feel upon the subject. It was a matter for doubt whether or not a king would be willing to give up his throne for the advantage of moving again in the circles he had mingled in in the past, especially when he had wedded a daughter of the race, whose affections might all be with her own people.

The two finally agreed that they would sound him upon the matter at the first opportunity, which came one evening when they were all gathered in the court of the wing of the palace, which was their favorite lounging place. With many misgivings Ritchie put the question to his friend, when the ladies were out of hearing, and watched his face narrowly as Tchincuilaa became thoughtful for a moment.

"I will not deny," he said finally, "that I

am tired of this quiet life. Kings may be all right in their way but as far as I am concerned I much prefer a select circle of friends in New York and the pleasures it would afford to all the thrones of this sort in the world. All that worries me is what Nanona would think of leaving her people."

"Ask her and see," said Sexton. "Of course there is little chance of our ever escaping, but Lord knows I don't care to pass the balance of my life in this place without making an effort to get away. I have explored every inch of the cliffs about here, and must confess that there does not seem to be much chance from that direction."

"I have a plan," said Ritchie, his eyes sparkling, "but unless we all go, I am willing to remain here. I would not desert my friend."

"Thanks, old fellow," said Tchincuilaa, grasping Ritchie's hand with a strong pressure. "I wouldn't ask such a sacrifice though. Sweet one," he continued to Nanona, who approached with Losaia. "These our friends

question thy Tchincuilaa. They seek to return to that great outer world of which thy husband has so often spoken to thee, and of which thou hast wondered. Before thy husband answers them, he would have thy wish. Would it pain thee to leave thy people and the prison land?"

"It is as my lord wills," answered Nanona, passing an arm about his neck and looking proudly into the eyes of her husband; "Nanona hath no other wish than to please her lord in all things."

"Nor would thy husband do aught to pain thee," was the tender reply. "Answer thou my friends for me. Whatever Nanona wills in this matter, that will Tchincuilaa do."

The beautiful princess paused for a moment. She looked about her at the walls of the court within which she had been reared, at the calmly sailing swans, through the archway to the outer stretch of country, at the slowly sinking sun, and then at the face of each of the others, resting finally upon that of Losaia, which was eagerly scanning her own.

Then she smiled a proud smile and sank at the feet of her husband in that reclining position so peculiarly graceful with the women of her country.

"Nanona, wife to Tchincuilaa, will follow her lord to the farthest ends of the earth," she said quietly. "This my land is passing-fair, and the air is balmy and filled with rest, yet what would they be to Nanona without her lord? Without him would they seem like the mounting without its jewel. In that land of which ye tell me, what would Nanona care for the mounting, for the jewel would be there, close to her heart. Seek ye the escape, for Nanona will go with ye."

"Heaven bless such a wife," cried Tchincuilaa, kissing her fondly, in spite of the presence of the others.

"Had you asked me I could have told you that long ago," said Losaia, passing an arm through that of her husband, and laughing softly. "We women are weak fools when we love."

"And their husbands likewise," laughed

Ritchie, chucking her playfully under the chin. "Myself, for example."

"Now tell us what plan you have," said Tchincuilaa abruptly. "I confess I am filled with the common desire."

"Let me work it out myself," answered Ritchie. "What I want is all the workmen I desire, and unlimited license as to material. With that I think I will succeed in my idea."

"Of course you can have the men, and anything else you want. I suppose we are at liberty to watch your preparations."

"Oh, there will be no secrecy about it, but I am a little diffident about outlining my ideas for they are in a line that usually calls for humorous comment. I intend to construct a flying ship."

There was a general laugh at this, and the faces of the others fell perceptibly. They had hoped for something at least plausible.

"You may laugh if you like," said Ritchie, a little hurt, "and I will confess that I would never attempt it but that this country pre-

sents peculiar advantages for the construction of one, not possessed by any other spot. Just wait and see."

After that day Ritchie was the center of attraction, not only for the little party so much interested in their escape, but also the people as a whole, who were much interested and filled with curiosity to see what was to be conceived out of the debris and conglomeration that Ritchie gathered about his huge workshop. The shops in question were set up near the cataract, from which the young amateur inventor received his power. He had constructed a water wheel, connected with which he had such machinery as he required. For the most part it was crude, but his workmen were apt, and seemed to take to the new ideas so quickly that when they saw the object they often assisted him in completing a design.

He had huge rollers for rolling out plates of heated sutaya, and blasts for reducing ores. The sutaya, on account of its peculiar formation, could be rolled out to a fractional part

of an inch, the sheets being impervious to air, rust or pressure when cooled. These sheets were rolled in the proper shape and then fastened by placing the edges lapped over each other, and running a hot iron along the joint. After several weeks of hard work, a huge cigar-shaped balloon had been constructed, about 125 feet in length, and 30 feet through at its center, built in three compartments. Each one of these was provided with a valve at the top, and one at the base, for the purpose of injecting or emitting the gases.

After this was completed, it was raised upon derricks, and a car constructed fifty feet in length of the same material; this was provided with a small cabin in its forward part, and in what might be called the stern, reservoirs for water, and compartments for coal. This was then firmly bound to the gas reservoirs overhead by rods and bands of sutaya, until all was as solid as if but one piece. So far the work had been comparatively easy. What followed was the machin-

ery and as Ritchie was but an amateur in that line he met with many failures. Sexton, who was familiar with some details from his mining work, assisted, and after many unsuccessful trials, a light engine was constructed, to be placed in position in the car, for the purpose of moving the propeller.

It was some time before they had succeeded in obtaining the proper temper to the metals for this engine. It was positively necessary that it should be as light as possible, and yet have sufficient strength, and the task was a difficult one. The sutaya, while stronger by far than steel, was so susceptible to heat, that it was impossible to use it except in a few instances, where there was no friction or heat. When this was completed to their satisfaction, a small generator for gas was constructed to place in the car, for Ritchie had an idea of carrying coal for ballast, and when it was desired to give more buoyancy, the burning of the coal would reduce the weight, while gas was generated at the same time. In order to descend it would be nec-

essary to open a valve, which would waste the gas in the reservoir, but the scheme of manufacturing the gas more than made up for the loss.

The propelling power was a row of blades of sutaya at either side of the car, running against the air one way over a wheel, and returning over it, presenting the edges, so that the resistance was all one way. A huge rudder, swung so that it could present a surface at either side, or be turned and elevated or depressed, sufficed for the guidance of the vessel. Ritchie's ship took over six months in the building, but when it was completed, and the little party looked it over upon his invitation, they were all filled with excitement over the probability of their deliverance. It looked so simple and so feasible that there was hardly a doubt but what it would work.

"It is certain to be able to carry us out of this place," said Ritchie, "even if it does not fulfil my expectations, and make the fame of its inventors when we sail into New York

with it in fine style. I fancy it would create a sensation on Wall street."

The next thing to be done was to fill the reservoirs with gas, and a machine had been prepared for that purpose. The car was first made fast by means of two large belts of sutaya passed over it, and then the coal was fired, and the generators began to do their work. While this was going on, Losaia and Nanona had the cabin properly furnished for their comfort, and brought skins and mats to cover the deck of the car, as the plates of sutaya were slippery and hard. The effect of the gas soon became apparent, and the reservoirs by their nervous twitchings showed that they were pulling with a fearful force at the car which was firmly anchored to the earth.

In some way, Umrro had become aware of the intended escape, and had begged so strenuously to be allowed to accompany the party, that its members had finally consented. The priest had given as a reason that he had not as yet convinced Sexton, or Rusta, as he

called him, of the falsity of his political opinions, and must needs accompany them in order to finish his sermons. There was a suspicion however, that the fine fellow was so much in love with his new friends that he preferred to leave his country rather than part with them. He had a faint idea also, that if they could succeed in escaping, they could also return, and by that means the people might be again restored to that outer world from which they had so long been separated. Finally everything was completed, the stores on board, and all that was required was to cut loose, and steam off in their new ship to that point in the world they might desire to visit.

"To-morrow," said Tchincuilaa, "we will visit the Cave of Protection, and prepare to carry away The Devil's Gold. I don't propose to lose it, after we have gone through so much on its account."

"Will the vessel carry it?" asked Sexton, anxiously.

"I think so," said Ritchie. "I was obliged

to shut off the gas, for I saw that we were getting too much buoyancy. By letting in a little more, we can easily carry it."

"Call out the palanquins," said Tchincuilaa, "and we will pay it a visit now, and make plans for carrying it away to the new air ship."

"I think Ritchie's vessel should be christened," remarked Sexton. "What shall we call her?"

"What shall be the name?" asked Tchincuilaa of Losaia. "Ritchie has built her, now let his wife give her a name."

"What saith my lords?" said Nanona, with a slight pout. "Do they forget that Nanona as yet understands but little of their strange tongue?"

"Pardon, oh Queen, for thy subjects," cried Losaia. "They ask thy sister to name the strange ship. Let it be Nanona. Thus do I name it, by the love I bear my sister. A happy voyage to The Nanona, and long life to its voyagers."

"Ever my loyal one," laughed Nanona. "Where will ever woman find thy like?"

"Off to the Cave of Protection," cried Tchincuilaa, merrily. "The men bear the palanquins. Prepare thy head gear, my queen, and let us away, for here approaches Umrro, ready to accompany us."

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHECY FULFILLED.

There had been little alteration in the appearance of the cave since the time when the four adventurers were first hurled into it from the vault above, to meet with the subsequent startling adventures in that strange land. There may have been an alteration in the position of the skins, or the placing of the offerings upon the altars, but the rest was the same. The huge mass of virgin metal still hung suspended upon the sacrificial altar of marble, where it had fallen so long before. Apparently it had not stirred. The lamps burned blue, and emitted the same strange odor.

It was Nanona's first visit to the cave, and she looked about her with wonder. She had heard the story of the escape told so often that she was deeply interested in every detail of the scene about her, and especially in the mass of

gold. "But for this yellow, silent rock," she said, caressing it almost with reverence with her slender hand, "might Nanona never have loved, for then had she not seen her lord."

The visit recalled other recollections to the other pair, and while Losaia shivered somewhat at the remembrance, Ritchie brought the blush to her cheek by reminding her of the words of endearment she had given him when she had thought all was lost. Umrro contented himself with standing by and watching his friends. He was impatient for the coming trip to that outer world of which Rusta had told him so much, and he was not interested in the securing of the gold. Sexton proposed that they should bring help in the morning, and after placing heavy timbers on the landing of the stairway outside, work the mass to its edge, and then allow it to slide over to the ground beneath. Once there, they could reduce it to smaller pieces and store a quantity, if not all of it, in the ship. His plan was finally agreed upon, and the party were ready to return.

They remained for a time on the landing, impressed by the sight that met their gaze. Far out over the brilliant sea of quicksand hung the sun, changed to a fiery, coppery hue by the atmosphere which had grown fearfully oppressive during the afternoon. The whole sky had a purple hue, and a repressed daylight pervaded everything. Beneath lay Sharrai, the white walls of its buildings outlined against the dark green, the dome of the temple glittering in the diffused light of the sickly sun. The sound of the waterfall came to them from the silence below, and by it the huge air ship pulled at its fetters as if anxious to escape from the entombed land, and soar aloft over the imprisoning cliffs.

The golden sea seemed to swell and undulate beneath the dropping sun. There was not a breath of air stirring. The heat had grown oppressive. Without knowing why, the party began to grow startled. They looked at each other's faces and beheld them bathed in a peculiar light. Below, the bearers of the palanquins lolled on the grass, and

awaited their coming. The cries from a herd of mountain goats came to them softly from a neighboring slope.

"Gosah, protect us, what is that?" cried Umrro in a startled voice, extending one arm in the direction of the quicksands.

They followed his glance, and beheld a grand but fearful sight. Far on the horizon, the watery desert sea had risen like a tidal billow, ever growing higher and more mighty. A distant rumble came to their ears, and the mountain shivered to its base. The swelling wave came rushing on toward the plains and valleys, ever growing more mighty, now sending forth columns of vapor, which burst from it like the steam from a pot of boiling meal. Its momentum was terrible, and while they gazed, it had reached the land, spread over it, and came on with irresistible force, straight toward the city of Sharrai.

"We are lost!" cried Nanona, clinging to her husband in terror. He clasped her closely but could not answer, struck dumb as the rest were with the awfulness of the sight.

The wave reached the air ship and covered it, a groan escaping from Ritchie as he saw the work of months wrecked and hidden from sight in a moment. On it came toward the city, and so quickly that only a few terror-stricken people were seen rushing about its streets before it was completely engulfed.

The dome of the temple stood out above it for a moment, and then that crumbled from the irresistible forces, and sank into the mass. The whole plain below them was buried, and still the work was not complete.

The rumbling and shaking continued with redoubled force, until the masonry beneath their feet seemed to be leaving them.

"Into the cave, for your lives!" cried Ritchie, lifting his half unconscious bride in his arms, and springing back.

The rest followed on the instant, and they were none too soon, for with an awful crash, the whole side of the mountain slid from the rock, and hurled itself to the depths below. The mountain trembled and shook, a sulphurous vapor filled the air, and darkness

fell upon them, lighted by fitful lightnings, followed by the rumblings and detonations of tumbling cliffs, and rolling landslides. The odors overcame them, and they sank into unconsciousness in each other's arms.

How long they lay there they never knew, for their watches had stopped. Sexton came to first, and with the aid of water taken from the bottles on the shelf, revived his companions. The sun was sending a brilliant flood of light into the cave, where a fearful sight met their gaze. They were covered with dust from falling rock and limestone. The Devil's Gold had been shaken from its resting place upon the altar, and in falling had buried Umrro beneath its mass. One hand alone was visible projecting from its edge. The body of the loyal priest was flattened beneath the fearful weight of precious metal. Never had a man a more costly tomb.

Part of the rear portion of the roof had fallen in, and rough, irregular natural steps had been formed to the caverns above. The whole side of the mountain had fallen away,

and the mouth of the cave looked out upon the land from a precipitous cliff, that could never hope to be ascended. The whole country had disappeared from view, and the face of nature was changed. The prophecy had been fulfilled. The earthquake had returned, and Nahaeco was no more. The forgotten race was buried beneath the surface of the earth. The distant cliffs had disappeared, and the quicksand sea had been carried to the depths of the earth, and a wild, desolate country from which here and there fitful jets of steam or smoke emerged was all that greeted the eye. As far as they could see, there was but one straight line of mountains left, in one of which they were confined.

Their one idea was how to escape from that horrible place. Sexton secured one of the lamps, and made a tour of inspection into recesses above. He came back with the cheering news that the earthquake had again opened up the barrier that had fallen in the path to the other side of the mountain, and unless some other portion of the roof had

fallen, they might retrace their steps in the same corridors they had traversed so long before, in search of the Devil's Gold. Without delay they gathered up the fragments of eatables about the cavern, together with the water bottles, and started upon the long journey through the cave. They found the same white marks that guided them thither, and some ten hours later, tired and footsore, they found themselves in the opening they had entered, and before them the way to freedom and civilization. There was the carcass of the grizzly they had killed, the air of the mountain having dried it as hard as a bone, though the hair had dropped off in large spots.

As it was growing late, they rested there for the night, and slept soundly, wearied out by the excitement and toilsome journey. The next morning Sexton left the young men and their brides, while he started out upon a short tour of inspection. Arrived at the first foothill, he saw in the distance a wagon train making its way across the valley, not over

two miles away. He made the best speed possible to intercept it, and found that it was a trader's outfit, loaded with goods for a mining camp store. The men were amazed at the strange sight he presented, but he refused to answer any questions, asking if he could purchase a quantity of clothing, and several horses. As he offered an enormous price for them in golden ounces, he succeeded in making the purchase, and weighed out to them a quantity of Nahaecian coins. They first assured themselves that they were gold of a pure quality, and leaving him at his request on the plain with his little pile of goods, and his five horses, they drove away, wondering what manner of man it was that looked after them standing there until they were out of sight.

Slinging his bundles upon the backs of the horses he proceeded at once to the cave, where his friends were overjoyed at his good fortune. They exchanged their garments for the rough goods purchased, and were ready for the return to civilization. Nanona

rebelled at first at the civilized costume, but finally consented to don what she termed the unhandsome things, with the understanding that she was to forego the shoes for the present, which, although they were several sizes too large for her tiny foot, she asserted were the most outlandish affairs that ever a maiden or matron, with any claims to style, put on.

"If my lord can abide Nanona in this most unholy costume," she averred, "then will I know indeed, that I possess his heart." Then with a sigh as she glanced at the little heap of beautiful jeweled robes in a corner of the cave, she allowed herself to be assisted on the saddle, and the journey was commenced. Three weeks after, they arrived at Oreville, and from there took the stage to San Francisco.

* * * * *

Several months later, a distinguished party occupied a box at a New York theater. A popular actress was to appear and the party which had just arrived in the city had decided to attend. No one to see the five occu-

pants of the box at which so many glasses were leveled, would have supposed that they were looking at a king and queen of Nahaeco and their friends. Sexton had recently settled up his business affairs, finding that he was several times a millionaire, and Ritchie had just received encouraging reports from Chili upon his wife's property, and as Damon had found that his large fortune had not been lost by his own disappearance, the party was a happy one.

They had not taken the trouble to see who was to appear in the play, so that when the star appeared, Ritchie gave a little start of surprise, and Damon looked at him curiously. The star was Bernice, the woman who had jilted Ritchie for a million. She recognized him at the same time, and a paleness overspread her face, while she faltered in her lines. She saw the loving look cast upon him by the dark-faced beauty at his side and her eyes flashed ominously. With an effort, the actress regained her composure, and the play went on.

Just then an old friend of Ritchie's entered their box. Extending a hand to Harlo, he nodded to Damon, and welcomed them both in a hearty whisper.

"Glad to see you back, old man," he said. "We all wondered where you had been keeping yourself. Came to see the new star—eh? She is all the rage now. The same old rage, though. More on account of her public character than any merit she possesses."

"What do you mean?" asked Ritchie, carelessly. "How did she make herself popular?"

"Don't you know? Why, the great divorce scandal. She made a fool of her husband until some kind friend was good enough to open his eyes, and then—the courts—telegraph facts all over the country, and the rest. By the way, now I think of it, she was an old flame of yours, was she not?"

"Let me introduce you to my wife, Charlie," said Ritchie, by way of evasion. "Loie, this is my old friend, Charlie Stewart."

"My wife, also, Mr. Stewart," said Damon, a little proudly.

Nanona smiled her own sweet smile, which lighted up her lovely face as the moon illumines a summer sea, and replied in the most musical of slightly broken English:

"I am delighted to meet Mr. Stewart. We would be pleased to have you call."

Others of their old friends visited the box before the evening was passed, and from that date both the young wives were the rage in New York society. Yet through it all, not a thought was given to the star upon the stage. True womanhood had cast into irrevocable shadow all the feminine baseness of the past.

THE END.

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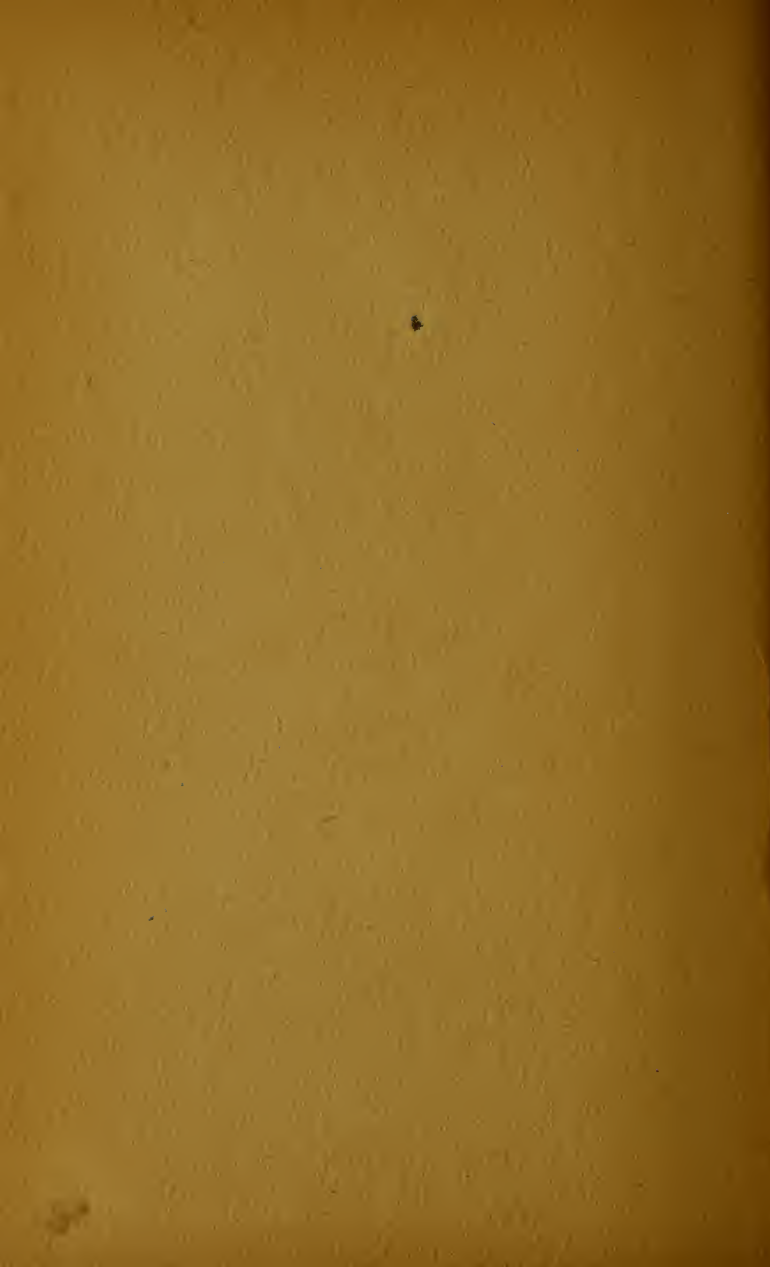
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